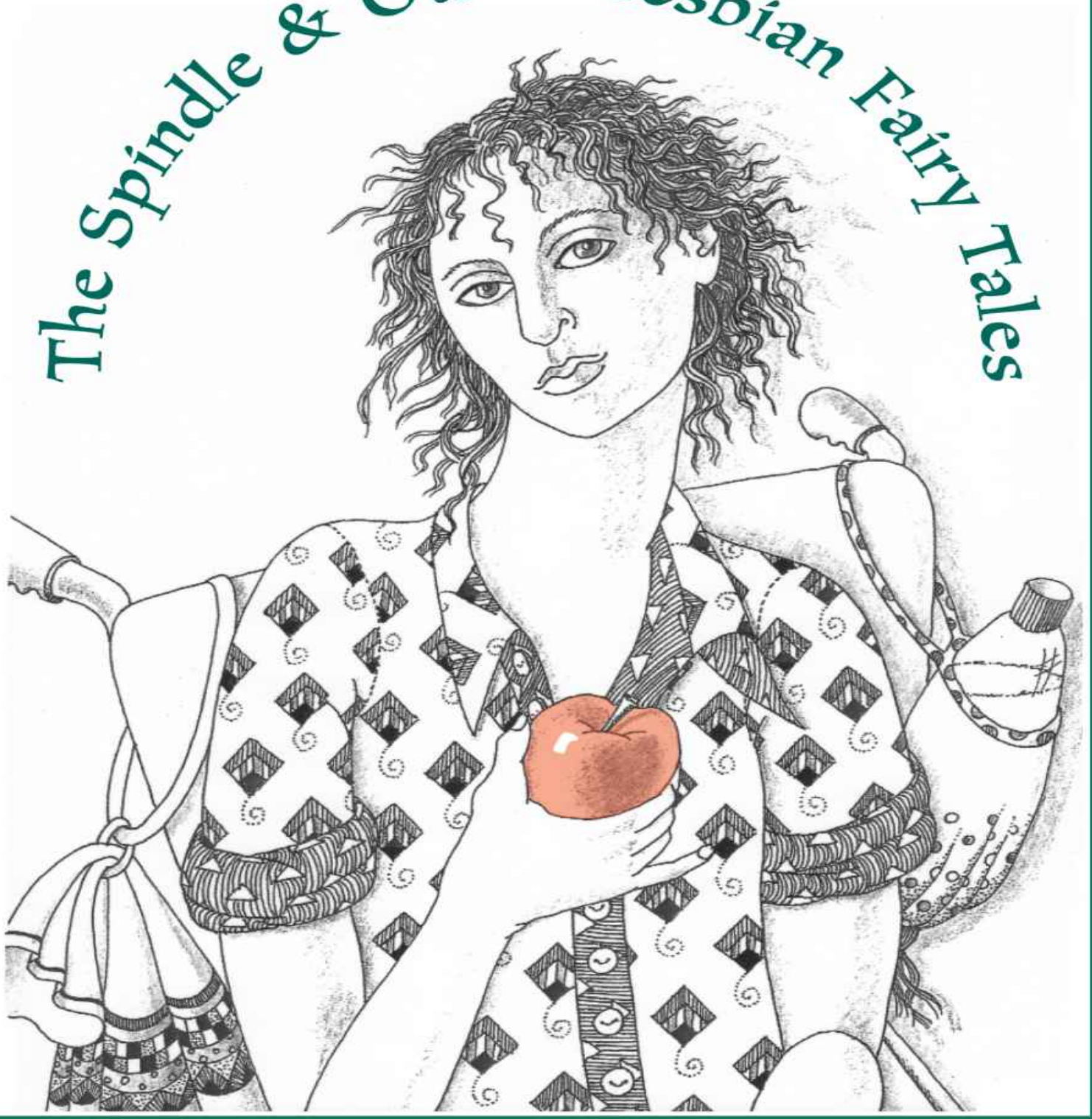
The Spindle & Other Lesbian Fairy Tales



By Carolyn Gage

Illustrations by Sudie Rakusin

The Spindle and Other Lesbian Fairy Tales

By
Carolyn Gage

Illustrations by Sudie Rakusin

The Spindle and Other Lesbian Fairy Tales

All Rights Reserved.
Copyright © 2009 Carolyn Gage

V1.0

This book may not be reproduced, transmitted, or stored in whole or in part by any means, including graphic, electronic, or mechanical without the express written consent of the publisher except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. The characters and events in this collection are completely fictional and bear no resemblance to anyone or anything, living, dead.

Published by Lulu.com.

Caution: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that *The Spindle* is subject to a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth), and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention and the Universal Copyright Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights including, but not limited to, professional, amateur, recording, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio and television broadcasting, video or sound taping, all other forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction, such as information storage and retrieval systems and photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are expressly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed on the question of readings and all uses of this play by educational institutions, permission for which must be secured in writing from the author or the author's representative. No amateur or stock performance or reading of the play may be given without obtaining, in advance, the written permission of the Author.

All inquiries concerning professional and amateur performance rights should be addressed to the Author via her website at www.carolyngage.com.

“The Godmothers” Copyright 1990 Carolyn Gage
“Becca and the Woman Prince” Copyright 1998 Carolyn Gage
“The Princess of Pain” Copyright 1995 Carolyn Gage
“The Furies” Copyright 2006 Carolyn Gage
“Andrea and Medusa Get Intimate” Copyright 2007 Carolyn Gage

“Becca and the Woman Prince” was originally published in *Love Shook My Heart: New Lesbian Love Stories*, edited by Irene Zahava, 1998 (Alyson Books, Los Angeles).

“The Princess of Pain” was originally published in *The Harrington Lesbian Literary Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 2006. (Harrington Park Press, Binghamton, NY).

All rights reserved. For permission, contact the author at www.carolyngage.com

Illustration for “The Furies” by Katie Diamond, Copyright 2006 Carolyn Gage.

Illustrations for “The Princess of Pain” and front cover copyright 2007 Sudie Rakusin
www.sudierakusin.com.
Front cover design by Heather Alexander.

Table of Contents

What Others Are Saying

Other Books by Carolyn Gage

Introduction

The Spindle

Cast of Characters
Scenes
Act I
Act II

The Princess of Pain

The Furies

Andrea and Medusa Get Intimate

Becca and the Woman Prince

Acknowledgements

What Others Are Saying:

"… Carolyn Gage is one of the best lesbian playwrights in America…" — *Lambda Book Report,* Los Angeles.

"Carolyn Gage has created a lasting feminist work in ***The Spindle and Other Lesbian Fairy Tales***, one that shatters stereotypes, defies hetero-convention and will defy the years as it becomes a classic in every feminist's library."—*Sacramento Arts and Entertainment Examiner.*

"The culture of women we have never had is invented in Carolyn Gage's brilliant and beautiful plays."—Andrea Dworkin, feminist philosopher activist, and author.

"The work of an experienced and esteemed playwright like Carolyn Gage is the air that modern theatre needs."—Jewelle Gomez, author of *The Gilda Stories,* San Francisco Arts Commissioner.

"… the toughest, most lesbian/feminist-identified work for theatre I know… brilliant and daring scripts…"—John Stoltenberg, former Executive Editor, *On the Issues*, author of *Refusing to Become A Man.*

"Carolyn's dramatic works, her teaching methods, and her passionate belief in women inspired many of us to look at our lives and come to see ourselves as heroines and Amazons. Her ability to clothe her meticulous research and knowledge of women's and especially lesbian history in enthralling dramas helped many of us to realize our rich lesbian/feminist heritage**…"—**Dana G. Finnegan, PhD.

"Gage has… given us a hero that doesn't run around in her underwear and taught us to take back the voices in our heads."—Tamanya Garza, The University of the Sciences, Philadelphia.

"An inspired spokeswoman for revolutionary radical feminism, I love to think of Carolyn out there now, urging women all over the world to access

that submerged anger that, once released, will enable them to find hope, pleasure, selfhood."—*Women's News*, Belfast, Northern Ireland

"Carolyn will bring… not only her incredibly prolific theatrical repertoire but also the richness of her intellect and astute political comprehension of women's lives and the necessity of our struggle—of all people's struggles—against the colonization of our minds and bodies. She has a great gift and the ability to synthesize the truths of women's lives and to tell them without shrinking from their pain and complexity."—Julia Penelope, co-editor of *The Original Coming Out Stories, For Lesbians Only*, and *Lesbian Culture: An Anthology.*

"Gage's particular brilliance lies in her skill at juxtaposing lesbian reality with our collective herstoric imagination as a people."—Bonnie Morris, Senior Associate at the Center for Women and Policy Studies and 5-year staff member Michigan Womyn's Music Festival.

"I am constantly amazed at Carolyn's ability to make complex social issues not only accessible but also irresistibly fascinating."—R.J. McComish, Literary Manager of the Portland Stage Company, Portland, Maine.

"I've long been intrigued and entertained by the originality of Carolyn Gage's work. Simply no one is writing about these subjects with such insight and humor."—Mariah Burton Nelson, author, *We Are All Athletes*, international women's sports authority.

Other Books by Carolyn Gage

Monologues and Scenes for Lesbian Actors: Revised and Expanded (2009)

Three Comedies

The Triple Goddess: Three Plays

The Second Coming of Joan of Arc and Selected Plays (2009)

Nine Short Plays

Sermons for a Lesbian Tent Revival

Like There's No Tomorrow: Meditations for Women Leaving Patriarchy

Take Stage! How to Direct and Produce a Lesbian Play

The Second Coming of Joan of Arc and Other Plays (1994)

Introduction

Is it possible to tell a fairy tale or a super-hero adventure story that will entertain and delight without resorting to the toxic conventions or dangerous fallacies that make up a traditional “happy ending?” I am thinking about those fallacious narratives where the good is always conflated with the physically attractive, or where innocence can prevail against evil, where romantic love is the transcendent solution, where physical might makes right, and where race, class, age, disability are magically disappeared for a mainstream audience who is more than willing to overlook their absence.

I am a playwright and I enjoy writing with challenges. Plays are enacted in real time, in relatively confined spaces, with human actors whose unfolding performances are experienced contemporaneously by the audience. These conditions place constraints on the writer, but I have found that, instead of hampering the imagination, these constraints actually provide a stimulus.

I believe that working with reality in crafting fables and fairy tales can be just as invigorating. Using the templates from these traditional stories to engage with contemporary issues offers new perspectives on old conflicts, new models for envisioning solutions, and new frameworks for acceptance that supplant denial.

Children’s theatre was my first love. Once or twice a year, a children’s theatre troupe would mount a colorful production—nearly always an adaptation of a fairy tale—at “the Mosque,” a huge former Masonic temple in Richmond, Virginia. I remember sitting rapt in its great curved mezzanine, watching the magic unfold. Later, just out of graduate school, when I was hired by a city parks-and-recreation program to direct a play, I chose *The Red Shoes*, a classic in the children’s theatre repertory. Working with adult actors to wring every ounce of action and humor from the script, I remembered an anecdote about Stanislavsky, in which the great Russian actor and director was asked by a member of his troupe how to act for

children. He replied, “We act for children the same way we act for adults—only better.”

Studying the work of children’s theatre playwright and producer Charlotte Chorpenning, I was struck by how attentive she was to her audience. She literally studied them, taking notes and using their reactions to workshop her plays. She interpreted the restlessness of a child in the audience as an indication that there was some problem with her script: Either the dialogue was confusing, the action was too peripheral to the dramatic arc, or there had been a let-down in the momentum of the play.

Because the discipline of writing for the stage stimulates me, I have always felt a special challenge when I considered writing for children. I began to consider whether it was possible to write a play for adults that would faithfully incorporate Chorpenning’s tenets of good children’s theatre. This was my project when I undertook to write *The Spindle*.

The Spindle is an adult retelling of the fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty. I use the spindle-pricking as a metaphor for incest. The spindle itself is obviously phallic, and I exploit the fact that, in the original fairy tale, fear of premature spindle-pricking was so great, the princess was kept in complete ignorance about them for sixteen years. The original “curse” of the premature spindle-pricking was death, but this sentence was modified to a hundred-years’ sleep. In my play, this “sleep” is the kind of post-traumatic amnesia and dissociation experienced by so many survivors of child sexual abuse.

It was a challenge to tell the story incorporating the conventions of children’s theatre: the fairy godmothers, the enchanted puppet, the wicked queen, the magic spells, the climactic battle of the forces of good against the forces of evil. It was also a challenge to deconstruct some of the fictional conventions, such as the “love conquers all” theme of the princess falling in love with the peasant, the discovery of the noble peasant’s true aristocratic heritage and his or her subsequent restoration of privilege, the daughter’s easy repudiation of the malevolent mother, and the myth of phallic rescue as an antidote to phallic violation.

The Spindle is not a story of individual violation. It is a story of archetypal evil, in which the perpetrator is an "Everyman," and the victim is "Everygirl." It is a story about the rupture of the mother-daughter bond that is both a contributing cause and an effect of child sexual abuse. In my play, as in my culture, child sexual abuse is epidemic, and nearly every adult female in the play has spindle scars that bear witness to her violation and to the presence of dissociative disorders.

The Spindle is also a lesbian play, with a lesbian central character and three lesbian fairy godmothers. The lesbianism is not incidental, but it provides a cultural referent outside the incest empire, a referent from which the young heroine can begin to critique the syndromes she is encountering in her own psyche and in the women around her.

It was my intention to juxtapose the elements of children's theatre—the magic, the color, the melodramatic action—with the banality and horror of incest. In using the fairy tale format, I wanted to demonstrate the archetypal dimension of incest, as well as bring home to the audience the fact that incest is a reality for so many girls (30-40%), that it is as much a part of their experience as the Disney fairy tales that are considered more appropriate to the supposed sanctity of childhood. *The Spindle* is my most autobiographical play.

"The Princess of Pain" is a fable about a woman living with chronic pain. I had a friend who was suffering with an excruciating, baffling condition called Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy, the key symptom of which is continuous, intense pain out of proportion to the severity of the injury, which gets worse rather than better over time. I wrote this fable for myself, to help me come to terms with the fact that I could not save, or fix, or even alleviate in small ways my friend's terrible pain. She was being tortured by her body all the time, and the drugs to numb the pain had so many side effects that taking them was no longer an option for her.

In "The Princess of Pain," the heroine undertakes a pilgrimage to the various goddesses from different cultures, confronting them with her anger and her helplessness in the face of a severe disability. It is an archetypal journey that many of us have traveled, or will travel, in our attempts to

make sense of injustice and atrocity—an emotional journey to the heart of the self. My mission in writing “The Princess of Pain” was actually a conundrum: to write a healing story about what can never be healed.

“The Furies” was my venture into the realm of comic-book superhero narratives, and I took my mission seriously. What would constitute a lesbian super-heroine? How would she look? What would be her superpowers?

I began by remembering all the women in my life who had impressed me with their power—real power, not just muscles and technology (although those have their place!). And, as I thought about these women, I began to see the faces of lesbians who were coping with the most serious oppressions: I saw the severely disabled lesbians. I saw the lesbians of color, and especially the lesbian butches of color. I saw the old dykes, lifelong victims of the slow-motion violence of poverty. I saw the women on the front lines of violence against women.

And, of course, I saw the young, confused, hurting lesbian survivors of sexual abuse, the lesbians engaged in a life-and-death struggle with that invisible opponent of their past, whose heroic contortions are so misread and ridiculed by those ignorant about Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome.

It became immediately clear to me that my super-heroines needed to be a team. A lone, lesbian super-heroine is an oxymoron. There’s nothing “super” about martyrdom. Alas, there is also more than a whiff of oxymoron in the words “lesbian team.” So this would be the action of my story: how lesbians, with our innate resistance to rules and hierarchy, with major differences in terms of class, race, age, physical ability, and culture—how we can form a team and render ourselves effective in a collective endeavor. In the story, this dynamic comes to a head around the issue of accepting a young trauma survivor who is desperate for acceptance, but hell-bent on proving that she is unlovable.

The sequel to “The Furies” is titled “Andrea and Medusa Get Intimate.” In this story, two of the Furies are away on a mission together. I was curious about how a mature super-heroine would handle the fourteen-year-old survivor’s crush on her. How was she going to set a firm boundary without

contributing to the damage that had already been done to the girl's trauma-impacted self-esteem?

"Becca and the Woman Prince" is a fairy tale, pure and simple. It was written with the intention that it might someday become the basis for a fully illustrated children's book. For me, it is not enough for children to know that Heather might have two mommies. I want Heather herself to know that she does not need to wait for a prince, that her "prince" might be another girl, and that she does not need to settle for being a submissive princess. I want girls to know that girls and women of different races can fall in love with each other, and that all of us must take responsibility for understanding and resisting the racism of the world around us.

All of these stories have been influenced by the remarkable women who have touched my life. Some of these are women who blaze trails, and others are women whose brilliance allows me to locate the coordinates of my own position and chart my course. It has been a privilege to live and write in a time when there are so many dazzling women artists and activists. I would like to end this introduction with the words of a lesbian who was both an artist and an activist, Paula Gunn Allen of the Laguna Pueblo and Sioux tribes:

I write because I am aware that whoever controls the image controls the population; that those who define us determine not only our lives but our concept of our very selves, and that colonization begins and ends with the definer, the contextualizer, and the propagandist.

The Spindle

A Children’s Theatre Play for Adults

Cast of Characters

THE PUPPET: A small girl or woman.
DOKO: A girl of thirteen.
BETHEEN: One of the godmothers, an older woman.
MARY: One of the godmothers, an older woman.
ANDREA: One of the godmothers, an older woman.
LORD CHANCELLOR: A man.
FIRST COUNCILOR: A man.
SECOND COUNCILOR: A man.
THIRD COUNCILOR: A man.
THE QUEEN; A woman in her early 30’s, Beauty’s mother.
BEAUTY: A girl of sixteen.
MILORD: The commander-in-chief of the army, late 50’s.
GUARDS: Men.
SERVANT: A man.
GUESTS: Men and women.

Scenes

ACT I

Scene 1: Doko’s cottage.
Scene 2: The Queen’s Council Chambers
Scene 3: Milord’s portrait gallery.
Scene 4: Doko’s cottage.
Scene 5: The Banquet Hall of the Palace.
Scene 6: Beauty’s bedroom.

ACT II

Scene 1: Beauty’s bedroom.
Scene 2: Doko’s cottage.
Scene 3: The Throne Room of the Palace.
Scene 4: Doko’s cottage.
Scene 5: Throne Room of the Palace.
Scene 6: Milord’s portrait gallery.
Scene 7: Doko’s cottage.

Time
Once upon.

ACT I

Scene 1

Lights come up on DOKO's cottage, a rustic one-room cabin with a fireplace. The cabin is furnished with a homemade table and stool, a bed, and a large cabinet. There are dishes on the table, and over the bed hangs a violin. There is a window, and the curtains are drawn. It is early morning, and the light is still dim in the cottage. There is a figure sleeping in the bed.

The door of the cabinet swings slowly open, and the PUPPET emerges. The PUPPET is played by a small woman or girl who is made up to look like a marionette. The PUPPET trails cords from her head, hands, elbows, knees, and feet. These are attached to the wooden cross used to manipulate her strings.

The PUPPET steps out of the cabinet and surveys the sleeping figure. Antagonized by the sight, she goes on a rampage - breaking the stool, smashing dishes, and tearing down the curtains. Just when she feels she has destroyed everything, she suddenly spies the violin above the bed. She is just starting to take this down when there comes a soft knocking at the door. The PUPPET quickly hangs the violin back on the wall and retreats to the cabinet, pulling her strings and cross in behind her.

BETHEEN: *(Offstage.)* Doko! Doko! Wake up! Do you know what day it is? Doko! It's the Princess' birthday! Wakeup! It's Beauty's sixteenth birthday! *(There is silence for a moment. The figure stirs.)* Doko! It's me, Betheen—your godmother! Doko!

(The figure in the bed moans and sits up, rubbing her eyes. This is DOKO, our heroine. A thirteen-year old lesbian, DOKO is strong, handsome, brave, and honest. She is in love with her best friend, although she doesn't know it yet. DOKO rises from the bed and stumbles to the door. She opens it. BETHEEN stands in the door, framed in a flood of light. BETHEEN is an

older woman, one of DOKO's three godmothers. A gentle, cultured woman, she has dedicated her life to intellectual and cultural pursuits.)

BETHEEN: *(At the sight of the vandalism.)* Doko!

DOKO: What? *(She turns around, horrified by what she sees.)* Oh!

BETHEEN: What have you done?

DOKO: I didn't do it! I was asleep!

BETHEEN: Are you sure?

DOKO: I just woke up! *(BETHEEN has a sudden revelation about the source of the vandalism. She covers her mouth, a gesture that DOKO misinterprets.)* You don't think *I* did this? Why would I wreck my own cottage? *(Examining the broken stool.)* Who would have done this?

BETHEEN: *(Suddenly invested in dismissing the incident.)* Maybe it was the wind.

DOKO: Wind isn't going to break the leg off a stool.

BETHEEN: It might have been an earthquake.

DOKO: Is your house like this?

BETHEEN: No.

DOKO: Then it wasn't an earthquake. Somebody came in here while I was asleep and did this. But why?

BETHEEN: Nobody would do a thing like this. It might have been a little tornado. You see? That would explain everything.

DOKO: A *little* tornado?

BETHEEN: Oh, yes. I'm sure that's possible. The main thing is you're all right. And look, your violin is still on the wall. *(She takes it down and plays a few notes.)*

DOKO: *Somebody* did this. Dishes don't just break themselves. And look… the curtain's torn to pieces! That's no tornado.

BETHEEN: I'll help you clean up, and I can loan you some new dishes, and we'll make new curtains. You see? There's nothing to be so upset about. Everything will be as good as new… Here—I'll play you a song I wrote for the princess' birthday.

DOKO: *Somebody* did this and I'm going to find out who.

BETHEEN: I think you'll like the way it changes into a jig—

DOKO: *(Jumping up suddenly.)* The puppet!

BETHEEN: *(Frightened, she stops playing.)* What about the puppet?

DOKO: Is it all right? *(She rushes to the cabinet and pulls open the door. The PUPPET hangs serenely on her hook. DOKO hugs her.)* Oh, thank the goddess, she's hasn't been hurt! See, Betheen? They didn't touch her.

BETHEEN: *(Exchanging a look, unseen by DOKO, with the PUPPET.)* Yes.

DOKO: Aren't you glad? I don't know what I would have done if they'd hurt her. Look at her, Betheen! Isn't she wonderful?

BETHEEN: *(Turning away.)* Yes, she's wonderful. Don't you want to hear the song I wrote for the princess' birthday?

DOKO: *(Preoccupied with the PUPPET.)* I'm going to give her the puppet.

BETHEEN: Who?

DOKO: Beauty. It’s her birthday, and because she’s the princess, they’re having a big banquet tonight, and I’m going to go and give her my puppet.

BETHEEN: *(Panicked.)* You can’t do that!

DOKO: Why not?

BETHEEN: Because it was your mother’s. And her mother’s before her. You can’t just give it away! It belongs in your family.

DOKO: Well, you told me my parents died when I was a baby, and I don’t have any relatives, and since Beauty and I grew up together—she’s my family and I want to give it to her.

BETHEEN: Doko, come here. Sit down. *(DOKO sits with the PUPPET on her lap.)* How old is Beauty?

DOKO: Sixteen—after today.

BETHEEN: And how old are you?

DOKO: Thirteen. *(BETHEEN nods and waits. DOKO gets defensive.)* So? We’re still best friends.

BETHEEN: And Beauty is going to be the queen of the whole kingdom someday—

DOKO: No, she’s not! She doesn’t want to be—

BETHEEN: *(Raising her voice.)…* and *you* are a helper in the palace kitchen.

DOKO: So? That doesn’t mean anything. I’m still her best friend.

BETHEEN: Do you think it’s going to stay that way forever?

DOKO: Yes. Maybe in your generation everybody grew up and became what their parents told them to, but we're different. I haven't got any parents, and Beauty doesn't want to be like her mother, and we've got it all planned what we're going to do.

BETHEEN: I see. *(Changing tack.)* Doko, do you remember your mother?

DOKO: A little.

BETHEEN: What do you remember?

DOKO: I remember that she wore very long dresses that would drag across the floor where I was playing, and I remember that her hair was very long and black, and she would let me play with it… She was very beautiful, wasn't she?

BETHEEN: *(Remembering.)* Yes, your mother was a very lovely girl.

DOKO- And I remember that she was always saying good-bye.

BETHEEN: Well, Doko, that was because she was a lady-in-waiting to the Queen. She was very busy. It wasn't that she didn't want to be with you. It was just her job. *(A pause.)*
And do you remember your father at all?

DOKO: No… That's funny, isn't it?

BETHEEN: *(Evasive.)* He was in the army.

DOKO: And you said he was stationed in another country, and that my mother went to be with him, but she didn't want to take me, because I was so little, and she thought it would be better to find a place to live before she sent for me. And that's when I went to live with you and Andrea and Mary, because you were my godmothers—only you didn't know I'd end up being an orphan and you'd have to raise me.

BETHEEN: And we loved every minute of it, Doko. Every single minute.

DOKO: And then, last year, Andrea helped me build my own cabin. And here I am!

BETHEEN: *(Smiling indulgently.)* Yes, here you are—quite the grown-up. *(A pause.)* Your mother loved you very, very much. You know that, don't you?

DOKO: Yes.

BETHEEN: You know she never would have left you behind, except that she thought it would be best for you.

DOKO: I know that.

BETHEEN: She didn't know she would never see you again.

DOKO: Why are you telling me this?

BETHEEN: I just wanted you to know that your mother loved you very, very much. And she wanted to be with you, and for you to be with her. And this was her puppet as a girl, and now it's yours. She gave it to you to protect you, and now you want to give it away. I want you to think about that carefully.

DOKO: I have thought about it.

BETHEEN: And you still want to give it to Beauty?

DOKO: Well, it's not like I'll be losing it. It's more like we'll be sharing it.

BETHEEN: I don't understand.

DOKO: Now that Beauty's sixteen, she can do whatever she wants, and she's going to get a little gypsy wagon, and then I'm going to build a stage on the back, and we're going to travel all over the country, singing and doing puppet shows. That's why I'm giving her my puppet—so it'll be ours.

See, I even wrote our first song: *(DOKO stands on a stool and manipulates the PUPPET to dance while she sings.)*

QUIT PULLIN' MY STRINGS!
QUIT JERKIN' ON ME!
JUST LEAVE ME ALONE—
I WANNA BE FREE!

YOU MAKE ME STAND UP
WHEN I WANT TO SIT DOWN—
WHEN I WANT TO STAND STILL,
THEN YOU MAKE ME SPIN 'ROUND!

IF I WERE A GROWN-UP WITH THE WORLD AT MY FEET,
WITH PLACES TO GO AND PEOPLE TO MEET,
WITH ALL OF THE THINGS I WOULD MOST WANT TO DO—
THE LAST THING OF ALL WOULD BE JERKIN' ON YOU!

(She makes the PUPPET look like she's the one pulling the strings.)

SO QUIT PULLIN' MY STRINGS!
QUIT JERKIN' ON ME!
JUST LEAVE ME ALONE—
I WANNA BE FREE!

(BETHEEN applauds, as DOKO puts the PUPPET back in the cabinet.)

BETHEEN: That was wonderful.

DOKO: You see? Everything's going to be fine. We know what we're doing.

BETHEEN: I hope so.

DOKO: What about *your* song? It's a jig?

BETHEEN: No, but it *turns into* a jig. This is how it starts out… *(She just begins to play when suddenly a loud shriek is heard, followed by banging on the door.)*

MARY: *(Offstage.)*Doko! Let me in! Let me in! Help! Murder! Help! *(More banging.)*

BETHEEN: It's Mary!

DOKO: *(Calling.)* The door's open.

(MARY bursts in. She is a pleasant looking, exotically dressed older woman. She carries a large basket and is completely out of breath. She turns and throws the bolt as soon as she enters. MARY is a "drama queen.")

MARY: *(Grabbing DOKO.)* Hide me! Hide me! You've got to hide me! *(She crawls under the table.)*

BETHEEN: Mary, what are you doing?

MARY: Hide me! Oh, it's after me! *(She crawls out from under the table, opens the cabinet, screams at the sight of the PUPPET, and slams the door shut. She opens it again.)*Oh… it's a puppet. *(To DOKO, laughing.)* I thought it was an evil spirit!

BETHEEN: Oh, for heaven's sake, Mary, what is—

MARY: Betheen, this is none of your business. I've got to hide. *(She tries to crawl under DOKO's bed, but she doesn't fit. BETHEEN pulls her out.)*

BETHEEN: Mary, stop acting ridiculous and tell us what this is all about.

MARY: You wouldn't understand.

BETHEEN: Yes, I would.

MARY: *(Defensive.)* No, you wouldn't. You don't believe in magic. *(BETHEEN shakes her head in exasperation.)*

DOKO: *I* do. What's the matter?

MARY: *(Indicating BETHEEN.)* Tell her to go away.

DOKO: She was here first.

BETHEEN: Stop being such a baby.

MARY: Me? A baby? Look who's talking! *(BETHEEN turns away in disgust.)* Doko, listen to me—evil is afoot!

DOKO: Well, *somebody* wrecked my cottage…

MARY: Aha! *(To BETHEEN.)* You see! You see! You see! You see! *(BETHEEN shakes her head. MARY turns back to DOKO.)* Exactly. Evil spirits… *And* when evil spirits are after you, there is nothing they wouldn't do!

DOKO: Have you seen them?

BETHEEN: Oh, Doko!

MARY: *(Dirty look to BETHEEN.)*Seen them? There's one after me now!

DOKO: What does it look like?

MARY: Well, its hair is all wild like lightning bolts, or wires, or—

BETHEEN: *(Innocently.)* Like snakes?

MARY: Right—like snakes! *(Realizing she's been tricked, she glares at BETHEEN, and then draws DOKO aside.)* Doko, evil spirits are very tricky… *very* tricky. *(Taking her even further aside.)* They don't always drip

blood and trail green, gooey guts, and have long sharp claws that can peel the face off your skull like it was the skin off a grape!

BETHEEN: Mary, for heav—

MARY: *(Ignoring BETHEEN.)* No, and they don't always have huge, bulging, bloodshot eyeballs with slits in the center like the eyes of a goat, and long yellow teeth that hang down—

BETHEEN: Mary!

MARY: You keep out of this, Betheen.

DOKO: Well, if they don't trail guts and have long teeth and big eyeballs—what do they have?

MARY: Disguises!

DOKO: Disguises?

MARY: That's right. They make themselves look like people… *(This is for BETHEEN's benefit.)*… and sometimes people you know…

BETHEEN: Mary—

MARY: … even people you *live with! (Just then, there is a loud banging at the door.)*

ANDREA: *(Offstage.)* Mary…! *Mary…!* Doko, open up! I know she's in there!

BETHEEN: It's Andrea! *(She starts to rise, but MARY grabs her.)*

MARY: Wait! It *sounds* like Andrea, but what if it isn't really Andrea at all?

DOKO: *(Excited.)* You mean—

MARY: I do. A harpy from hell.

ANDREA: *(Offstage.)* Mary! I know you can hear me. I'm going to count to ten, and if you haven't opened the door by then, you're going to be very sorry! One… two…
DOKO: What are we going to do?

BETHEEN: I'm going to open the door.

ANDREA: *(Offstage.)* … three…

MARY: No!

ANDREA: *(Offstage.)*… four…

DOKO: But what if it really *is* Andrea?

ANDREA: … five…

MARY: There's one way to tell.

DOKO: What is it?

ANDREA: *(Offstage.)*… six… Better open up!

MARY: You say, "GO AWAY!"… and if it does, then you know it was a friend.

ANDREA: *(Offstage.)*… seven…

DOKO: And if it doesn't go away…? *(MARY nods.)* … it's a harpy from hell?

MARY: Exactly.

ANDREA: *(Offstage.)* Mary, you come out here!

MARY: *(Raising her voice, demonstrating her theory to DOKO.)* Go away! I don't want to talk to you!

ANDREA: *(Offstage.)* I'm not going away until you come out here!

DOKO: *(Amazed.)* It's the harpy!

BETHEEN: Oh, for heaven's—

ANDREA: *(Offstage.)*… eight…

BETHEEN: *(Rising.)* This is absolutely ridiculous. I'm going to let Andrea in.

MARY: *(Lunging at her.)* No! No!

ANDREA: *(Offstage.)*… nine…

DOKO: *(Dancing around.)* It's the harpy! The harpy from hell!

ANDREA: *(Offstage.)*… TEN!

(BETHEEN, who has crossed to the door dragging MARY, throws it open. ANDREA stands there. ANDREA is a strong, tough butch woman. She stands scowling in the doorway. As soon as MARY sees ANDREA, she stands up and collects herself with great dignity.)

MARY: Did you want something, Andrea?

ANDREA: I want my prize rooster.

MARY: I don't know anything about your rooster.

DOKO: *(Whispering to MARY.)* But what about the harpy from hell?

MARY: *(Sharply.)* Shhh!

ANDREA: I saw you kidnapping him.

MARY: I did nothing of the kind. He's probably off doing you-know-what with the hens. That's all they think about, you know.

ANDREA: So you don't know what happened to my rooster?

MARY: No.

ANDREA: *(Spying MARY's basket, she pulls out a long feather.)* Then what is this?

MARY: *(Shrieking and grabbing for it.)* Don't touch that! It's the sacred feather of the Eagle of Ballibowron! I need it for a special ritual.

ANDREA: It's the tail feather off my prize rooster, and he needed it to keep his butt warm! *(She grabs it back.)*

MARY: *(Chasing ANDREA.)* Give it back!

ANDREA: You stole it!

MARY: *(Winded.)* No… I… didn't… *(Suddenly BETHEEN steps between them and snatches the feather.)*

MARY: *(To BETHEEN.)* That's mine! Give it to me.

ANDREA: You stole it.

BETHEEN: I'm not going to give it to either one of you. Just look at you! Acting like children—and in front of Doko, too! What is she going to think of her godmothers? How do you expect her to have any respect for grown-ups?

MARY: I'll have you know that this feather is for a sacred protection ritual for the Princess Beauty's birthday.

ANDREA: *(Disgusted.)* A protection ritual!

MARY: Well, she s going to need one if Milord shows up tonight!

BETHEEN: *(Shocked.)* Milord?

MARY: *(Repossessing the feather.)* There. I guess now you'll take me seriously.

DOKO: Who's Milord?

BETHEEN: *(To MARY.)* He's been away from the kingdom for years. What makes you think he's back?

MARY: My voices tell me.

ANDREA: She means her cousins who work in the palace kitchen.

DOKO: Who's Milord?

BETHEEN: *(To DOKO.)* Never mind, Doko. It doesn't concern you at all.

MARY: Well, it's going to concern her if he shows up at the banquet tonight. The spell says that on Beauty's sixteenth birthday—

BETHEEN: Mary! Be quiet!

DOKO: What spell? *(Silence.)* What's going to happen to Beauty? She's my best friend! *(Crossing to MARY.)* What spell?

MARY: The spell that says something bad will happen to Beauty on her sixteenth birthday and she'll fall asleep for a hundred years.

DOKO: *(To BETHEEN.)* Is it true? Is there such a spell? *(BETHEEN doesn't answer.)* Why didn't anyone tell me about this?

BETHEEN: Children don’t need to know everything.

DOKO: And who’s Milord?*(There’s another silence. She goes to MARY.)* Who’s Milord?

MARY: He’s the one who put the spell on her, because the Queen didn’t invite him to the christening.

DOKO: Why didn’t she invite him? *(Silence.)* I want to know why the Queen didn’t invite him and why it made him mad enough to put a curse on my best friend!

BETHEEN: *(Drawing DOKO aside.)* Doko, do you remember Milord at all? He used to visit the palace when you and your mother lived there. Do you remember him?

DOKO: No.

BETHEEN: Are you sure?

DOKO: I think so. Why?

BETHEEN: *(Relieved.)* Nothing. I just wondered, that’s all.

DOKO: So what’s the bad thing that’s going to make Beauty fall asleep for a hundred years? Well? *(A long pause.)*

MARY: She’s going to prick her finger on a spindle.

BETHEEN: Mary!

DOKO: What’s a spindle?

BETHEEN: It’s nothing you need to be concerned about. They’re all gone. They’ve been banned from the kingdom since the christening. There hasn’t been a spindle here for sixteen years.

DOKO: *(To MARY.)* What is a spindle?

MARY: Well, it’s this long, kind of round, hard, pricky thing—

BETHEEN: Mary! I don’t think it’s appropriate to be describing spindles to a thirteen-year old.

DOKO: I think I know what they are.

BETHEEN: You do?

DOKO: It’s kind of… well… I think I could draw one. *(The godmothers crowd around as she draws. They pull back as she finishes and are silent for a moment.)*

MARY: That’s a spindle, all right.

BETHEEN: *(Alarmed.)* Doko, where did you see one?

DOKO: I don’t remember.

BETHEEN: I want you to think very hard. This is important.

DOKO: I don’t know.

ANDREA: She probably saw a picture of one in a book.

MARY: Well, it’s a good thing I’ve got the sacred feather of the Eagle of Ballibowron. That’s all I can say.

ANDREA: And that s going to stop the commander-in-chief of the army?

MARY: *Magic* is going to stop the commander-in-chief of the army.

ANDREA: You and your magic! What a crock of—*(She grabs the feather.)*

MARY: *(Trying in vain to snatch it back.)* I'll have you know my magic is very powerful.

ANDREA: Right.

MARY
It is! What about the spell I used on your poison oak? It went away, didn't it?

ANDREA: After three weeks!

MARY: See? And what about my spell to bring the cat home?

ANDREA: He came home, because it started to rain!

MARY: And who do you think made it rain? And what about the time your boots were stolen by the fairies, and I made them bring them back?

ANDREA: Mary, my boots were under the bed.

MARY: Right where I told the fairies to put them.

DOKO: *(To BETHEEN.)* Maybe we should talk to the Queen—

MARY: That bitch?

BETHEEN: Mary! That's her best friend's mother!

MARY: Well, she's still a bitch and Doko knows it. *(Turning to DOKO.)* Don't you?

DOKO: Well, she doesn't spend very much time with her daughter.

MARY: See? Besides, there's no point in saying anything to her about Milord. She's scared to death of him. She always was — even when she was a girl.

ANDREA: She hasn’t got any power anyway. Milord is the head of the army, and she’s too smart to do anything to upset him.

DOKO: Then what are we going to do?

MARY: I don’t know about the rest of you, but *I’m* going to do a protection ritual! *(She grabs the feather from Andrea and runs out the door.)*

ANDREA: *(Giving chase.)* Oh, no you don’t … ! *(She exits.)*

BETHEEN: *(Closing the door after them.)* Good riddance! Sometimes I wonder why I put up with the two of them.

DOKO: *(Beginning to clean up the broken dishes.)* Because you love them.

BETHEEN: *(Watching her for a moment.)* Doko, does Beauty know anything about spindles?

DOKO: *(Not looking up.)* I don’t know. We’ve never talked about them.

BETHEEN: You won’t say anything, will you?

DOKO: *(Looking up.)* I’m going to tell her about the curse.

BETHEEN: I don’t think that’s a good idea.

DOKO: Why not?

BETHEEN: Because it’s not good for children to know about all the evil in the world. They’re going to have to find out soon enough.

DOKO: But if Beauty knows how dangerous spindles are, she can avoid them.

BETHEEN: *(Shaking her head.)* More likely, she’ll be fascinated and want to go looking for one.

DOKO: So you don’t want me to tell her?

BETHEEN: Not until tomorrow. After her sixteenth birthday, the spell won’t have any power.

DOKO: *(Considering.)* I’ve never kept a secret from Beauty before.

BETHEEN: It’s just for a day. Promise me you’ll wait… Doko? *(DOKO hesitates.)* Will you promise?

DOKO: All right. But just ‘til tomorrow.

BETHEEN: *(Stroking DOKO’s hair.)* You’re spending the night with her anyway, aren’t you?

DOKO: Yes.

BETHEEN: Well, then, you can be her bodyguard. *(Tousling her hair.)* Beauty’s lucky to have such a loyal friend.

DOKO: I’m the lucky one. *(There’s a loud crash. DOKO jumps up.)* What’s that… ?The puppet! *(She rushes to the cabinet and flings open the door. The PUPPET lies tangled in a heap. DOKO turns to BETHEEN, who hasn’t moved.)* It’s okay. She must have just fallen off the hook. *(As she lifts the PUPPET, it turns to BETHEEN with a malicious grin.)*

Blackout

End of Scene

ACT I

Scene 2

Lights come up on the interior of the Chamber of the Queen's Privy Council. Three of the QUEEN'S COUNCILORS are seated around the table, and the LORD CHANCELLOR stands rigidly by the door. The men are irritated that the QUEEN is keeping them waiting. The FIRST COUNCILOR drums his fingers on the table. The FIRST COUNCILOR is the true power behind the throne. The LORD CHANCELLOR is afraid of the Queen. Suddenly a trumpet is heard.

LORD CHANCELLOR: Gentlemen, the Queen approaches! *(They all rise.)*

COUNCILORS: Hail to the Queen! *(THE QUEEN enters. She is intimidated by her COUNCILORS, and it takes considerable effort on her part to maintain a show of authority in their presence.)*

QUEEN: *(Acknowledging the men.)* My Lord Chancellor… *(To the others.)* Members of the Queen's Privy Council… please be seated. *(They sit. THE QUEEN reaches for the decanter of water at the center of the table. Her hand shakes and she spills as she tries to pour. The COUNCILORS exchange looks. After an awkward silence, the LORD CHANCELLOR clears his throat.)*

LORD CHANCELLOR: Your Majesty…

QUEEN: *(Nodding to acknowledge him.)* My Lord Chancellor.

LORD CHANCELLOR:… with your gracious permission, I would like to present for your approval some routine bills which the members of your Privy Council have drafted—

QUEEN: *(Cutting him off.)* You may proceed.

LORD CHANCELLOR: *(Glancing nervously at the COUNCILORS, he presents the first document.)*… the usual harvest fair allocations—two

hundred roast pigs, five hundred bushels of corn, six thousand pumpkins—the usual—

QUEEN: *(Impatiently cutting him off.)* Yes, yes. I can read. *(She imprints it with her seal, and the LORD CHANCELLOR sweeps it away. He presents the next document for approval.)*

LORD CHANCELLOR: A requisition from the royal quartermaster, for the new uniforms for the palace guard. *(The QUEEN frowns.)* If Your Majesty will remember, at the last Council it was noted that the old ones had gotten rather moth-eaten and—

QUEEN: I remember, I remember. *(She applies her seal, and the LORD CHANCELLOR removes the paper and presents the third document in silence. The COUNCILORS exchange glances as she reads. She smiles and looks up.)* What is this?

LORD CHANCELLOR: *(Leaning over her shoulder, agitated.)* This..? Let me see… Oh, this…

QUEEN: *(Pleasantly.)* Yes, this. It appears to be a list of names.

LORD CHANCELLOR: *(Relieved at her apparent good humor.)* Why, yes, indeed… so it does…

QUEEN: *(To the others.)* Can any of you explain the meaning of this list?

FIRST COUNCILOR: *(Coolly.)* It is an official guest list, Your Majesty.

QUEEN: I see. An “official guest list.” And may I ask the occasion for this “official guest list?”

FIRST COUNCILOR: *(Bowing his head with mock respect.)* For your daughter the Princess Beauty’s birthday banquet, Your Royal Highness.

QUEEN: I see. And you felt that the Queen was not competent to select the guests for her own daughter’s birthday party?

SECOND COUNCILOR: *(Frightened.)* We felt there might be certain dignitaries who may have slipped Your Majesty's mind—

QUEEN: *"Slipped my mind,"* councilor?

FIRST COUNCILOR: *(Unruffled.)* Certain officials who may have been overlooked due to their long illness or long absence.

QUEEN: Ahh. An absence of, say, ten years? *(There is a silence.)* That *is* what this is about, isn't it? Did you think I wouldn't notice Milord's name at the bottom of the list—in a very cramped hand, too, I might add. *(To the THIRD COUNCILOR.)* Yours, I believe. *(The THIRD COUNCILOR looks away.)* Well, you should have spared yourself the trouble. The banquet is tonight, and the invitations have already been sent. *(She holds the list out to the LORD CHANCELLOR. He makes no move to take it. She turns to him.)* Take it away. *(There is a long silence, as the QUEEN continues to hold out the document.)*

FIRST COUNCILOR: Perhaps the Queen has forgotten that Milord is the commander-in-chief of Her Majesty's army?

QUEEN: The Queen has forgotten nothing. *(To the LORD CHANCELLOR.)* Take this away. *(He still doesn't move. The QUEEN looks at her COUNCILORS. Only the FIRST COUNCILOR meets her gaze.)*

FIRST COUNCILOR: As members of the Privy Council, we would be remiss in our duties if we were to advise an action which might result in the Queen having to entertain an intruder within the halls of her own palace.

QUEEN: I'm glad you see it my way. *(She hands him the list.)*

FIRST COUNCILOR: *(Handing it back.)* Her Highness misunderstands me. It is in order to spare the Crown that humiliation that we submitted the list. *(He places it in front of her again.)*

QUEEN: *(Finally, realizing his meaning.)* I see. Well… *(She examines the document as if for the first time.)* Everything seems to be in order. *(She affixes her seal and hands the document to the LORD CHANCELLOR.)* Will you see that these invitations are issued immediately, as the party is tonight? Oh, except for the name at the bottom. I shall see to that one personally. *(There is an awkward silence. The QUEEN turns to her COUNCILORS with a charming smile.)* After all, he is the godfather of my daughter, and I think he might be very offended if the invitation were to come to him through official channels. Yes, and we wouldn't want to offend Milord, would we? Now, if you gentlemen will excuse me—*(She rises to exit.)*

FIRST COUNCILOR: *(Rising to interrupt.)* Your Majesty —

QUEEN: *(Shocked at this new outrage.)* Gentlemen, the Queen wishes to retire to her chambers.

FIRST COUNCILOR: Your Majesty, on behalf of the other members of the Privy Council, I must beg your indulgence. A question of the most urgent nature has been brought to our attention—

QUEEN: And the Queen will be happy to give it her full attention - at our next meeting. *(She rises. The LORD CHANCELLOR blocks her exit, drawing his sword.)*

FIRST COUNCILOR: Would it please the Queen to consider the Council's request before retiring to her chambers?

QUEEN: *(Staring in shock at the sword.)* Gentlemen, the Queen is considering a great many things at this moment. *(The SECOND COUNCILOR looks down at his feet.)*

FIRST COUNCILOR: *(Clearing his throat.)* Today is Her Royal Highness Princess Beauty's sixteenth birthday—

QUEEN: *(Not taking her eyes off the sword.)* I am aware of my own daughter's birthday.

FIRST COUNCILOR: *(Repeating himself as if he had not been interrupted.)* Today is Her Royal Highness Princess Beauty's sixteenth birthday, the day she legally comes of age, and so it is only natural that Her Majesty's subjects should be wondering if it is the Queen's intention to abdicate the throne—

QUEEN: *(Turning on him.) Abdicate?*

FIRST COUNCILOR: *(Unruffled.)*… abdicate the throne in favor of the regency of Her Majesty's daughter, the Princess Beauty?

QUEEN: Abdicate in favor of my daughter? *(She looks from one to the other.)* Gentlemen, were it not for Her Majesty's present indisposition, she might be tempted to believe that she had just entertained a proposal of treason from the members of her own Privy Council! Under the present circumstances, it is clearly in the best interest of all parties that this meeting be adjourned immediately!

(The COUNCILORS look at each other uncertainly. The FIRST COUNCILOR makes a sign to the LORD CHANCELLOR. He drops his hand from his sword, bows, and steps to the side of the door. One by one, the COUNCILORS rise and kiss the QUEEN's hand as they file out of the chamber. After they leave, the QUEEN collapses, her head on the table. Suddenly, she sits up and rings for a SERVANT. The SERVANT appears.)

QUEEN: Tell the Princess Beauty that her mother wishes to speak with her. *(The SERVANT bows out. The Queen crosses to a sideboard with a wine decanter and begins to pour herself a drink. The SERVANT re-enters.)*

SERVANT: Her Royal Highness, the Princess Beauty!

(The SERVANT retires, and BEAUTY appears in the doorway. She is a young woman of sixteen. She wears a simple dress, and her hair is natural. She is afraid of her mother, and she hangs back at the side of the door.)

QUEEN: There you are… And aren't you looking lovely… ?

BEAUTY: *(Her mother's compliments make her nervous.)* You sent for me?

QUEEN: I thought that on the occasion of your sixteenth birthday, a little mother-and-daughter chat might be in order, don't you agree?

BEAUTY: *(Her mother never talks to her.)* I guess so.

QUEEN: Sit down, Beauty. *(Noticing that BEAUTY is looking at her wine glass.)* Would you like a glass of wine? You're a legal adult now.

BEAUTY: Not until midnight.

QUEEN: Oh, yes. Well, we must observe the formalities, mustn't we?

BEAUTY: *(Rising quickly.)* If you'd like me to have a glass —

QUEEN: Not at all! Sit down. I was making a little joke. *(An awkward pause.)* Well, and so how are you?

BEAUTY: *(The following exchange is extremely formal and stilted.)*
Fine. And yourself?

QUEEN: Fine. Looking forward to tonight?

BEAUTY: Oh, yes. And you?

QUEEN: Yes. It isn't every day that one's daughter comes of age. *(BEAUTY smiles nervously.)* And do you have any plans?

BEAUTY: *(Careful.)* Plans?

QUEEN: Plans. *(BEAUTY says nothing.)* Is there a certain young man from some neighboring kingdom who has happened to capture your fancy, or some charitable cause you are burning to espouse—or perhaps you would like to travel?

BEAUTY: *(Jumping in.)* Yes!
QUEEN: Yes?

BEAUTY: Yes.

QUEEN: Well, come, dear. You need to be a little more specific.

BEAUTY: To travel.

QUEEN: *(Thoughtful.)* I see. You want to visit foreign countries and broaden your horizons—

BEAUTY: No! *(The QUEEN is surprised by her vehemence.)*
I want to travel here.

QUEEN: Here? You mean within the kingdom?

BEAUTY: Yes.

QUEEN: Beauty, I am afraid I don't understand you at all. What could there be in our sleepy little villages and hamlets to arouse such passion in the breast of a sixteen-year old?

BEAUTY: Doko and I want to have a traveling puppet theatre.

QUEEN: *(Frowning.)* Doko? The cook's helper?

BEAUTY: She's going to write the songs, and make up the stories, and I'm going to dance and sing, and we'll both work the marionettes—

QUEEN: A puppet theatre?

BEAUTY: Yes.

QUEEN: *(Pausing to consider.)* With a gaily-painted little gypsy wagon?

BEAUTY: Yes!

QUEEN: Where the villagers will gather to view your little performances, and where you will take their babies on your knee, while the older children admire the puppets, and the grown-ups talk among themselves about what a remarkably talented and beautiful young woman you are—in fact—just the sort of princess they would like to have someday for their queen.

BEAUTY: *(Confused.)* Well, I guess it could be like that.

QUEEN: Yes, I guess it could, couldn't it? And I guess it could set everyone to comparing the fresh and talented young Beauty with her tired old harridan of a mother—couldn't it? *(BEAUTY tries to interrupt, but the QUEEN escalates.)* And I guess they could all start wishing the old bitch would just cash in her chips, so they could put this charming young princess on the throne, couldn't they? *(BEAUTY tries to protest, but the QUEEN continues to escalate.)* And then if there was some kind of mysterious accident where the Queen just happened to lose her life, I guess no one would ask too many questions about such a fortuitous circumstance, would they? Not with such a paragon of youth and beauty on the throne!

BEAUTY: *(Confused.)* Mother! How could you say that?

QUEEN: How? Because I am the Queen, and one does not get to be Queen by believing in fairy stories.

BEAUTY: *(Stunned.)* You think I want to be the Queen?

QUEEN: Don't you?

BEAUTY: I never thought about it.

QUEEN: Oh, come on, Beauty. You're an adult now… I think we can drop the pretenses.

BEAUTY: *(Beginning to panic.)* What pretenses?

QUEEN: “What pretenses?” Oh, that’s good, Beauty. Quite the little actress. Your little dog-and-pony show should be quite a hit.

BEAUTY: *(Frantic.)* What are you talking about?

QUEEN: You may as well know, I never wanted a child. You were an accident. *(BEAUTY tries to protest, but the QUEEN overrides her.) And* I have not been a very good mother. *(Again BEAUTY tries to protest.)* No, it s true—and frankly I never tried to be. But I did try to be a good Queen. *(Musing as she sips the wine.)* Yes, I did try to be a good Queen. *(Looking at the glass.)* And apparently I have failed at that, too.

BEAUTY: But you love me now—

QUEEN: *(An abrupt change in her mood.)* What do you want, Beauty? Half the kingdom? An annuity? I can make it a very handsome one… Or a palace of your own… ?

BEAUTY: Mother! I don’t want anything from you except for your love!

QUEEN: Well, it’s too late for that. You should consider your other options. Now, whose idea was this little good-will tour of the kingdom?

BEAUTY: Doko and I thought it up together.

QUEEN: I see. You don’t want to tell me. *(BEAUTY tries to protest.)* I think you should know that word of your attempt to force my abdication has leaked out—

BEAUTY: *What?*

QUEEN: Oh, don’t act surprised. It’s very hard to keep secrets from the Queen.

BEAUTY: Who told you that? Who told you I was trying to do that? *(The QUEEN says nothing.)* It was one of your councilors, wasn’t it? *(The QUEEN smiles.)* And you believed him!

QUEEN: Why shouldn’t I?

BEAUTY: Because they’re liars! They only tell you what you want to hear. Don’t you know that? Behind your back, they laugh at you! They don’t respect you at all, because they think you’re just a foolish old woman! *(The QUEEN slaps BEAUTY in the face, hard.)*

QUEEN: Treason! If you ever speak to me like that again, I’ll see that you hang.

BEAUTY: *(Stunned.)* Mother!

QUEEN: *(Icy.)* “Your Majesty.”

(She exits. BEAUTY doesn’t move for a moment, and then, slowly, she crosses to the wine decanter and pours herself a glass. She is drinking it when DOKO enters quietly behind her. She is carrying a large picnic basket, which she dumps on the table next to BEAUTY.)

DOKO: Surprise!

BEAUTY: *(Spilling her wine.)* Doko! You scared me!

DOKO: Look what I’ve got! I smuggled it out of the kitchen! *(Lifting the napkin.)* Strawberries, and peaches, and pecan cookies, and smoked cheese, and some fresh bread - smell it! - and some honeycomb —

BEAUTY: *(Preoccupied with cleaning up the spill with her sleeve.)* What’s it for?

DOKO: For you—for us! After the banquet, I thought we could have a little party of our own up in your room. A midnight feast! *(BEAUTY seems distracted.)* What’s the matter? Did I forget something?

BEAUTY: No… it’s just… I’ve been thinking about the puppet theatre—

DOKO: So have I, and tomorrow morning the Royal Wagonmaster is coming by with some of his best wagons—

BEAUTY: *(Interrupting.)* Doko, I don't think I want to do it.

DOKO: The theatre?

BEAUTY: It… it doesn't seem very realistic.

DOKO: What's realistic?

BEAUTY: I think Mother would want me to stay here.

DOKO: Did she say that?

BEAUTY: Not exactly…

DOKO: Beauty, that's how mothers are. They think the only way to protect their daughters is to keep them at home. I know. My mother was like that, too. All they can think about is how dangerous it is out in the world—but when your mother sees how happy you are, and how popular our theatre is, and how everyone in the whole kingdom loves you—she'll be so proud of you!

BEAUTY: You don't think she'll be jealous?

DOKO: Why would she be jealous?

BEAUTY: I don't know.

DOKO: Mothers aren't jealous of their daughters! Your mother just wants you to be happy.

BEAUTY: I don't know.

DOKO: Trust me. She's just worried, that's all. But you know what you want. We've been talking about this for a year. Remember… ? How we're

going to cook our food over a fire at night, and sleep out under the stars, and how we'll get up whenever we feel like, and we'll go wherever we want any time we want, and it'll just be the two of us, and we'll sing and we'll make up stories and tell jokes, and we'll laugh and sometimes we'll cry, and we'll hold each other—and nothing in the world will be able to come between us!

BEAUTY: *(Hugging DOKO.)* Oh, Doko, you're so brave! If it weren't for you, I'd never have the courage to go through with this!

DOKO: But if it weren't for you, it wouldn't be any fun! You see, we're a perfect team!

BEAUTY: *(Embracing DOKO fiercely and impulsively.)* Doko, don't leave me! Don't ever leave me! *(Just then the QUEEN enters. Self-conscious, BEAUTY pulls away from DOKO. The QUEEN ignores her daughter.)*

QUEEN: There you are, Doko—I was looking for you. You weren't in the kitchen.

DOKO: I just came by to wish Beauty "happy birthday."

QUEEN: I have an errand for you. *(Producing an envelope.)* I need someone to deliver this message. Do you know who Milord is?

DOKO: *(Off-guard.)* Milord… ?

QUEEN: *(Impatient.)* Yes, Milord—the commander-in-chief of the army. *(Looking at BEAUTY.)* He's also Beauty's godfather, although she probably doesn't remember him. He's been away at war for ten years. *(Turning back to DOKO.)* Anyway, he has apparently returned, and I need for you to deliver this invitation to the banquet immediately. Do you understand?

DOKO: Yes.

QUEEN: *(Handing her the envelope.)* Have one of the Palace Guards give you directions… Well? What are you waiting for?

DOKO: *(To BEAUTY.)* Good-bye, Beauty… uh, your Royal Highness. *(To the QUEEN.)* Your Majesty… *(She exits. BEAUTY watches her mother nervously. The QUEEN turns towards her.)*

QUEEN: Shouldn’t you be getting dressed?

BEAUTY: *(She starts to say something, but changes her mind.)* Yes, Mother. *(BEAUTY exits. The QUEEN watches her leave, and then reaches for the glass of wine.)*

Blackout

End of Scene

ACT I

Scene 3

Lights come up on the portrait gallery of MILORD's castle. The walls are hung with large, ornate frames. All of the frames are draped with white cloth. MILORD bursts into the hall, surrounded by the COUNCILORS and the LORD CHANCELLOR. He is a powerful man, dressed in a military uniform. Several GUARDS straggle on, carrying large trunks.

MILORD: *(Booming.)* Oh, it's good to be home again! *(To the GUARDS.)* You men—! Take those trunks up to my chamber! *(The GUARDS exit. MILORD turns to look at the room.)* Ah… the portrait gallery…! Yes, I have missed my gallery! *(Turning abruptly to the COUNCILORS.)* Well, what are you waiting for? Undrape the paintings! *(All but the FIRST COUNCILOR scurry to do his bidding.)*

FIRST COUNCILOR: It's good to have you back, Milord. The people have missed you.

MILORD: Don't lie, councilor. The people have not missed me. The people are too busy seeing to their sheep and their fields to pay attention to politics. The Commander of the Army is hardly a man conspicuous in his absence—however flattering the thought.

FIRST COUNCILOR: Then allow me to say that *we* have missed you, Milord… and sorely.

MILORD: What—the Queen's Privy Council? *(A mocking smile.)* I should think you would have managed quite capably in my absence, with such a mistress of statesmanship at the helm.

FIRST COUNCILOR: Indeed, Milord.

MILORD: *(He surveys the undraped paintings. These are empty frames, with the contents best left to the audience's imagination.)* Well, let's have a look! Yes, there they are! Exactly as I left them. Not a day

older, not at care wiser. *(Turning to the SECOND COUNCILOR.)* Well, what do you think?

SECOND COUNCILOR: *(Off guard.)* Most… impressive, sir.

MILORD: Impressive? Gentlemen, you are looking at the loveliest girls in the kingdom—on the continent, I wager! Just look at that breast, man… that nipple… so soft you could reach out and touch it! Well, go ahead! TOUCH IT! *(Uncomfortable, the SECOND COUNCILOR touches the painting.)* Well, now it didn't bite you, did it? Ha! Impressive? Gentlemen—look at these girls! Fresh as the morning dew. Virgins, all of them. And hand-picked. Yes, my girls. I painted every one of them. They sat—or lay—here, right here, gentlemen, in this very hall, sometimes from sunup to sundown, without moving a hair, and I painted them. Can you imagine, gentlemen, being in the presence of any one of these girls, lying naked before you—hour after hour, day after day? Can you imagine it? *(He turns to the THIRD COUNCILOR suddenly.)*

THIRD COUNCILOR: No, sir.

MILORD: Well, try!

THIRD COUNCILOR: Yes, sir.

MILORD: Well?

THIRD COUNCILOR: Well, I should think it would be very… tempting.

MILORD: Tempting? You say it would be tempting?

THIRD COUNCILOR: Yes, sir.

MILORD: And how would you be tempted?

THIRD COUNCILOR: To… I don't know, sir.

MILORD: Yes, well, it *was* tempting. I was tempted to sculpt instead of paint. I was tempted to throw out all the colors of my palate and burn my brushes in despair of ever capturing the glory, the splendor of a young girl in the first flush of her maidenhood. But I did not, as you can see. I painted them. And here they are, ten years later, waiting for me. Smiling, radiant, beautiful. My girls. My little girls. Waiting for me. Aren't you? Waiting for your papa to come home… *(He begins to take a tour of the hall. The COUNCILORS remain awkwardly in the center of the room.)*

FIRST COUNCILOR: Milord?

MILORD: *(Absorbed in a painting, he doesn't turn.)* Yes?

FIRST COUNCILOR: Milord, tonight is the Princess Beauty's sixteenth birthday.

MILORD: *(Indicating the painting.)* Look at her delta, gentlemen… just look at that, like a plump little partridge—

FIRST COUNCILOR: Milord, the Princess Beauty is turning sixteen tonight.

MILORD: *(Annoyed, he turns from the painting.)* I heard you the first time, councilor. And what is her birthday to me?

FIRST COUNCILOR: I thought you might remember the curse—

MILORD: The spindle curse? Of course, I remember. I cursed her myself, did I not? *(Silence.)* Did I not?

SECOND COUNCILOR: You did, sir.

MILORD: And has our little princess been pricked?

FIRST COUNCILOR: No, Milord.

MILORD: *(Surprised.)* No?

SECOND COUNCILOR: She has been kept from knowledge of spindles altogether, Milord.

MILORD: Ah… That would be her mother's doing.

FIRST COUNCILOR: Indeed.

MILORD: *(Crossing to one of the painting.)* Her mother… A very beautiful woman ten years ago… And now? *(No one speaks. He turns on the LORD CHANCELLOR.)* Lord Chancellor, is the Queen still beautiful?

LORD CHANCELLOR: It's not for me to say, sir.

MILORD: Then who *is* to say?

FIRST COUNCILOR: The Queen is ten years older, Milord, and her daughter is on the eve of turning sixteen.

MILORD: Either the echo in this hall is formidable, or you are repeating yourself, councilor. *(Silence.)* Am I to be invited to this celebration?

FIRST COUNCILOR: Yes, Milord. The Queen is sending the invitation by special messenger.

MILORD: How thoughtful of her. And now, gentlemen, did you have any other news you wished to communicate?

FIRST COUNCILOR: No, Milord. None except our joy at having you home again. *(MILORD looks at him.)* Well… good day, Milord. *(He and the other men back out of the hall.)*

MILORD: *(After their exit.)* Bootlicking morons! *(He is turning to leave as DOKO enters.)*

DOKO: Excuse me—

MILORD: *(Turning in annoyance.)* What is it? *(DOKO notices the paintings. She is stunned.) What is it? (Mesmerized by the paintings, she does not respond.)* Speak, or I'll cut your tongue out, boy! *(She turns towards him.)* What's this? It's a girl! What are you doing here? *(Frozen, she holds out the invitation.)* What is it? *(He opens it and glances at it.)* Oh, yes. The Queen's invitation to the birthday banquet. *(Folding it, he places it in his pocket.)* What did you say your name was?

DOKO: *(Very quiet.)* Doko.

MILORD: "Doko?" It seems I remember hearing that name from somewhere. Do you know me?

DOKO: I… don't think so.

MILORD: *(Trying to remember.)* "Doko..." Were you ever at the palace?

DOKO: When I was a baby.

MILORD: Ten years ago?

DOKO: Yes.

MILORD: Ah. *(A pause.)* And where do you live now?

DOKO: With my godmothers.

MILORD: Interesting. And they will be at the banquet tonight?

DOKO: Yes.

MILORD: And you?

DOKO: Yes.

MILORD: Well, then, we shall see each other. Do you like my paintings, Doko? *(She doesn't say anything.)* They're girls about your age. *(She still*

doesn't say anything.) It's a hobby of mine. Do you have hobbies?

DOKO: Puppets.

MILORD: Puppets? *(She nods.)* Well, perhaps you'd like to bring your puppets here sometime, and we could share our hobbies with each other. I'd like to paint you.

DOKO: I have to go.

MILORD: Yes, and so do I, but I want you to think about that, Doko. We could have a lot of fun. *(She turns to go, and he grabs her. She gasps.)* You will think about it, won't you? *(He doesn't let her go.)*

DOKO: Yes.

MILORD: Good. *(He loosens his grip and she runs off. MILORD, smiling after her, unfolds the invitation and exits reading it.)*

Blackout

End of Scene

ACT I

Scene 4

Lights come up on DOKO's cottage. The PUPPET is pulling the sheets off the bed and tearing them. Suddenly the door flies open, and BETHEEN enters. the PUPPET collapses on the floor.

BETHEEN: *(Slamming the door behind her.)* I knew it was you! *(Jerking the PUPPET to her feet.)* I know what you're up to… You didn't fool me for a minute—not for one minute! I know exactly what you're up to! Well, I'm not going to have it. Do you hear me? *(She shakes the PUPPET violently.)* I'm not going to have it! You're not going to spoil everything now, after all our years of hard work! Do you hear me? I'm not going to have it! *(She lets go of the PUPPET, and the PUPPET drops to the floor.)* You listen to me! The next time, I'm going to take matters into my own hands, and then you are *really* going to be sorry! Do you hear me? *(She drags the PUPPET by the collar to the cabinet and hangs her roughly on a hook.)* You remember what I said! *(She slams the cabinet shut, bundles up the sheets, checks the room one more time, and exits. The light lingers on the cabinet door for a few seconds.)*

Blackout

End of Scene

ACT I

Scene 5

Lights come up on the banquet hall. The QUEEN's table is elevated on a dais across the back of the stage. The tables for the GUESTS are set up downstage. The GUESTS are seated at the tables or visiting quietly among themselves. The QUEEN and her entourage have not arrived, and her table is empty. The GODMOTHERS enter downstage. MARY is struggling with a huge box, and ANDREA and BETHEEN are arguing.

ANDREA: Did you see that? Did you see the way that guard put his hands on me?

BETHEEN: Oh, for heaven's sake, Andrea! It's his job!

MARY: They're checking everyone for weapons.

ANDREA: Yeah, well, they missed a few of mine… Hai! *(She throws a double punch.)* Hai! Hai! *(Throwing a kick with her left and then her right foot.)*

BETHEEN: Stop it, Andrea! Everyone's looking!

ANDREA: I hope so.

MARY: Oh, quit showing off and give me a hand with Doko's present!

BETHEEN: I told you not to bring the puppet.

MARY: But Doko has her heart set on giving it to the Princess for her birthday.

BETHEEN: Well, then she should have come home and gotten it herself.

MARY: Betheen, you know perfectly well that she probably couldn't get off work in time, and the real reason you're having a hissy-fit is because you

don’t approve of her giving it away.

BETHEEN: It’s a family heirloom. She’s too young to understand the value of it.

ANDREA: Where is Doko, anyway? Wasn’t she supposed to meet us here?

MARY: *(Snapping at ANDREA.)* She’ll be here! *(Turning back to BETHEEN, raising her voice.)* And it’s nobody’s business *what* Doko does with her things.

BETHEEN: *(Trying to quiet her down.)* I didn’t say it was my business. I just have *an opinion*, that’s all.

MARY: *(Escalating.)* Well, if you didn’t have so many opinions—

BETHEEN: Keep your voice down! *(Just then DOKO rushes in.)*

DOKO: Mary! Betheen! I’ve seen him! I’ve seen him!

MARY: Seen who?

DOKO: Milord! I’ve seen him!

BETHEEN: *(Grabbing her.)* Where?

DOKO: At his castle, in this room that had all these pa—

BETHEEN: Doko! What were you doing at his castle?

DOKO: The Queen sent me there. *(To MARY.)* Mary, he had all these paintings—a whole room full of them, and they—

BETHEEN: Was the Princess with you?

DOKO: What?

BETHEEN: Was Beauty with you?

DOKO: *(Puzzled.)* No…

BETHEEN: Good. Then it's all right.

MARY: Look, Doko—I brought your puppet, so you can give it to Beauty. *Certain people* didn't think it was a good idea, but I knew you wanted it here.

DOKO: *(Distracted.)* Thanks. *(Turning to BETHEEN.)* Betheen, did you know about the paintings? I mean, it was a whole room full of them, and they were all these *girls* with no—

BETHEEN: *(Sharply.)* We can talk about that later. *(A trumpet blows.)*

DOKO: But—

BETHEEN: Listen! They're getting ready to start the banquet. Come on… *(She steers DOKO towards a table.)* Oh, look at you! Here… *(She straightens DOKO's clothing. Another fanfare is heard. The other GUESTS seat themselves as the LORD CHANCELLOR enters and mounts the dais.)*

LORD CHANCELLOR: The Most Exalted Members of Her Majesty's Privy Council! *(The COUNCILORS file in and stand by their chairs.)* Her Royal Highness the Princess Beauty! *(BEAUTY enters wearing a modest gown.)* Her Imperial Highness the Queen!

(The QUEEN enters in a magnificent gown. She acknowledges BEAUTY, the COUNCILORS, and her guests, and then she takes her seat. BEAUTY sits, and then the COUNCILORS, and then the GUESTS.)

SECOND COUNCILOR: *(Rising on cue, he addresses the QUEEN.)* Would our noble Queen be gracious enough to favor us with a speech on the occasion of her daughter's birthday?

QUEEN: *(Feigning surprise.)* But I'm not prepared!

THIRD COUNCILOR: Just a few words, Your Majesty. We implore you.

QUEEN: *(Rising with a show of reluctance.)* Well… I hardly know what to say. After all, this is really my daughter's day. The only speech I could give would be to wish her all the happiness which has been denied to me by the cares of state, which were so suddenly thrust upon me by the death of my own dear husband—our late king. I have not begrudged my people the long years of service which robbed me of my youth—for it has been a privilege to serve the memory of my beloved husband in carrying out his wishes for the good of the kingdom, but it would be my hope for the Princess Beauty that she should be spared these onerous burdens, that she be allowed to bask in the glow of domestic tranquility and delight in the joys of motherhood, so that by her example of virtuous wifeliness she may come to occupy a position among her husband's people far more exalted than that granted by cruel circumstance to her mother. *(She bows her head to indicate that she is through, and the SECOND COUNCILOR begins to clap. Following his lead, the GUESTS also begin to clap. Suddenly there is a commotion offstage.)*

MILORD: *(Offstage.)* Stand off! Ha! Insolent fellow!

(There is a clanging of steel followed by a loud scream and then the sound of falling armor. The hall is completely silent for a moment, and the MILORD enters, sheathing his bloody sword. The QUEEN is still standing. She blanches at the sight of him.)

MILORD: Forgive me, Your Highness. I was accosted in the hall by some unruly fellow bent on dispossessing me of my sword. *(Turning to BEAUTY.)* And you must be the Princess Beauty. Please accept my apologies for arriving so late. I was only very recently informed of your banquet, and I have come with as great a dispatch as possible—*(Smiling at the QUEEN.)* … under the circumstances. *(He bows.)* Allow me to present my gift to Your Highness, which I trust will amend the unfavorable impression occasioned by my tardy and somewhat tumultuous entrance. *(He turns and claps his hands for one of the GUARDS, who enters with a large and gorgeously wrapped painting. While he is turned away, BEAUTY turns to her mother.)*

BEAUTY: Who is this man?

QUEEN: Hush! It is Milord, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army.

MILORD: *(Turning back to BEAUTY.)* In honor of your sixteenth birthday, I have selected a gift from my own collection of art—*(Suddenly there is a loud noise from the Puppet's box. MILORD draws his sword.)* Hold! Who's there! It's a trap! *(He makes as if to lunge at the box, but DOKO jumps up and grabs his arm.)*

DOKO: No, wait! It's just a puppet! She must have fallen over. Wait! *(She pulls open the lid, revealing the PUPPET lying in a heap.)*

MILORD: A puppet? *(To BEAUTY.)* I didn't realize the Princess was still playing with dolls.

DOKO: *(Angry.)* It's not a doll—It's a puppet!

BEAUTY: Doko! I'm sure Milord is not interested in the distinction.

MILORD: *(Crossing to where BEAUTY sits.)* On the contrary. I'm *charmed* by the dissipations of girls. *(He kisses her hand.)*

QUEEN: *(With icy formality.)* Will you present your gift, Milord?

MILORD: Most willingly, Your Highness—if only your lovely daughter will oblige me.

QUEEN: What do you mean?

MILORD: I mean only that these tangled ribbons will not yield to the fumblings of a rough soldier's hands half so well as to the tender ministrations of these… *(Taking BEAUTY's hands.)*… most graceful and agile ambassadors. *(The GUESTS murmur their approval of his gallantry.)*
BEAUTY: *(Feeling her power over her mother.)* Spoken like a court poet, Milord. If your hands were half so agile as your tongue, the ribbon would

submit readily enough. *(The GUESTS respond again.)*

QUEEN: Doko! Open the present. *(DOKO advances awkwardly and tears the paper and ribbons off, revealing an empty gilt frame. The GUESTS gasp at the sight of it.)*

ANDREA: It's the Queen herself!

MARY: Without any clothes!

DOKO: *(To BETHEEN.)* It's one of the paintings! That's what I was trying to tell you—

BETHEEN: Hush! *(The Queen rises abruptly and exits. MILORD feigns surprise.)*

MILORD: Your Majesty… ! *(The COUNCILORS have risen.)*
Forgive me… I seem to have offended the Queen.

SECOND COUNCILOR: Indeed, sir. I should think you have.

THIRD COUNCILOR: Indeed.

LORD CHANCELLOR: Shall I order the painting destroyed?

SECOND COUNCILOR: Immediately.

MILORD: Please—allow me then to destroy it myself… *(He draws his sword.)*

BEAUTY: *(Rising.)* Wait! *(She crosses down to the painting.)*
I think… it's very… lovely. *(Murmurs from the GUESTS.)*

SECOND COUNCILOR: But your Highness —

BEAUTY: Councilor, the painting was given to me, and it is my wish that it not be destroyed.

THIRD COUNCILOR: But, the Queen—

MILORD: *(Raising his hands.)* Gentlemen! It distresses me that my simple offering should be the cause of dissension. Perhaps, with Her Highness' permission, I should take the painting and depart.

BEAUTY: No! I intend to hang it in my room. Milord, what was my mother's age when you painted this?

MILORD: *(Her humble servant.)* She was exactly your age, Your Highness.

BEAUTY: *(Studying the painting.)* Milord, will you do us the honor of joining us at the Queen's table for the banquet?

MILORD: It would be my privilege. *(She offers her arm, and he takes it, escorting her back to the dais. BEAUTY takes the QUEEN's chair, and MILORD seats himself next to her. The GUESTS are murmuring.)*

BEAUTY: And now, let the music and feasting begin! *(Music is heard, and SERVANTS begin to carry in great platters of food. DOKO stands next to the PUPPET box, stunned by her friend's betrayal. ANDREA crosses to her and puts a consoling arm around her.)*

Blackout

End of Scene

ACT I

Scene 6

Lights come up on BEAUTY's bedroom, a charming princess' room with french windows that open onto a balcony. It is the same night, after the banquet. The QUEEN, still wearing her banquet gown, is pacing angrily. She is extremely agitated. Suddenly the door opens. BEAUTY enters, accompanied by a SERVANT who is carrying the painting.

BEAUTY: *(Unaware of the QUEEN's presence.)* Set it over there, by the window, please. *(The SERVANT sets it down and turns to exit. The QUEEN steps out from the corner.)* Mother!

QUEEN: *(To the SERVANT.)* Wait! *(To BEAUTY.)* What are you doing with that painting?

BEAUTY: *(Defensively.)* It's mine.

QUEEN: No, it's not. *(To SERVANT.)* Take it away!

BEAUTY: *(To SERVANT.)* No! Don't touch it! *(To her mother.)*
I'm sixteen now and you can't tell me what to do.

QUEEN: I'm your mother and I certainly can. *(To SERVANT.)* Take the painting. *(BEAUTY steps in front of it.)* Get out of the man's way, Beauty.

BEAUTY: *(To SERVANT.)* If you touch me, I'll have you arrested.

QUEEN: Beauty! I've never seen you like this! What's come over you?

BEAUTY: *(To the SERVANT.)* I mean it.

QUEEN: *(To the SERVANT.)* All right. You may go. The Princess has been drinking. *(He nods and exits.)*

BEAUTY: No, I haven't!

QUEEN: How could you behave that way in front of the servants?

BEAUTY: Me? It was *you!*

QUEEN: I can't believe you would try to deliberately humiliate me like this after all I've done for you.

BEAUTY: *(Upset.)* What? What have you done for me?

QUEEN: *(Bitterly.)* I gave up my life. Isn't that enough?

BEAUTY: You didn't give up your life! You never had time for me. You said so yourself.

QUEEN: *(The tragic queen.)* Beauty, I'm going to tell you something that I hoped you would never find out, but you're sixteen now, and you have a right to know… *(Pausing.)* The king was not your father.

BEAUTY: *(Confused.)* What do you mean?

QUEEN: I mean that my husband, the man you called "daddy" was not your real father. I fooled him into believing that he was, but he wasn't. I was already pregnant when I married him. That's *why* I married him.

BEAUTY: Who *was* my father?

QUEEN: That's not important. He left the kingdom shortly after you were born. The point is, because of you, I was a wife and mother before I even reached *my* sixteenth birthday. I never had my youth, my freedom. I gave it all up because of you. Because of you, I married a man I didn't love. Because of you, I have never had a life. I just thought you might want to know that, when you decide to treat me like the enemy.

BEAUTY: I'm sorry.

QUEEN: *(Fighting back her tears.)* How could you know? I didn't want to tell you.

BEAUTY: Mother, I'm sorry—here. Take the painting. I don't want it.

QUEEN: *(In tears.)* No, you keep it. There! *(Indicating the painting.)* That lovely young girl—with the world at her feet! That was me! That was what I gave up for you! You keep it.

BEAUTY: *(Hysterical.)* Mother, I don't want it!

QUEEN: No! No, it's yours. I'm going to bed. Happy sixteenth birthday, darling. *(She exits.)*

BEAUTY: Mother! *(She tears a blanket off the bed and drapes it over the painting. MILORD appears at the french windows. He is about to knock when DOKO appears at the door, holding the PUPPET. MILORD retreats out of sight.)* Doko!

DOKO: *(She is very angry.)* You forgot your present. *(She drops the PUPPET in a heap and turns to leave.)*

BEAUTY: *(Afraid.)* Doko?

DOKO: What?

BEAUTY: Aren't you going to… I thought you were going to spend the night?

DOKO: *(Sarcastically.)* What, and play with dolls?

BEAUTY: I didn't say that.

DOKO: No, but *he* did, and you let him.

BEAUTY: I was afraid. I'm sorry.

DOKO: Yeah, well, I’m sorry, too. Happy Birthday.

BEAUTY: Wait! Please don’t go! Please don’t leave me!

DOKO: Why?

BEAUTY: Because… I’m afraid.

DOKO: Well, then why don’t you call in some guards? You don’t need me.

BEAUTY: I do!

DOKO: What for? To clean your pots?

BEAUTY: Doko! Don’t talk to me like that. I can’t stand it!

DOKO: Look, you don’t love me, and you were never serious about the puppet theatre, and it’s all just been a little fairy tale, hasn’t it?

BEAUTY: You don’t understand! You don’t understand anything, because you’re so free.

DOKO: Free? I have to work for a living!

BEAUTY: Yes! And it’s *your* job and it’s *your* money and nobody tells you what to do. I can’t even put on a dress without mother’s having to approve it and the whole court commenting on it. You can be who you are all the time, but I can’t. I have to be somebody else when you’re not here.

DOKO: Why?

BEAUTY: Because… because I was born a princess. I have… responsibilities.

DOKO: Why?

BEAUTY: I don’t know.

DOKO: You don’t have to have them.

BEAUTY: Yes, I do. I can be the good-girl princess or the runaway bad-girl princess, but I’ll always be the princess.

DOKO: I don’t see you that way.

BEAUTY: Well, you’re the only one who doesn’t.

DOKO: We can take our wagon and go somewhere where nobody knows you.

BEAUTY: I still know me.

DOKO: Couldn’t that change?

BEAUTY: *(Despondent.)* I don’t know.

DOKO: Look, Beauty—look at me. I love you. You’re funny and smart. Hey, you’re smarter than me. And you’ve got really great ideas when you relax and let yourself go. This place is what’s making you scared. That’s all it is. Get out in the country with the wildflowers and the green hills and that wide blue sky—and they don’t know anything about queens and castles and princesses. Will you trust me?

BEAUTY: I’m scared, Doko. I’m not like you. You’re the same person all the time. Me, I’m two people in one body, and I never know which one is going to be me. Find somebody else to go with.

DOKO: I don’t want anybody else. I love you. You know that, don’t you? I’ve loved you ever since I can remember.

BEAUTY: Hold me. *(DOKO puts her arms around BEAUTY.)* Kiss me, Doko. *(DOKO kisses her cheek.)* No, I mean kiss me like they do in the fairy tales. *(DOKO kisses her. It’s a long kiss.)*

DOKO: *(Pulling back in confusion.)* Whoa… I… I don't know what to say.

BEAUTY: It was good, wasn't it?

DOKO: *(Deeply disturbed.)* I don't know.

BEAUTY: You liked it.

DOKO: I don't know.

BEAUTY: *I* liked it. Kiss me again.

DOKO: I need to go. I'll meet you in the morning. We'll go look at the wagons, okay?

BEAUTY: Okay. *(DOKO turns to leave, but she trips over the PUPPET.)*

DOKO: Oh… ! I… uh… tripped over the puppet. Tomorrow morning?

BEAUTY: Tomorrow morning. *(DOKO exits and BEAUTY crosses to the PUPPET. She makes it do a little dance:)*

QUIT PULLIN' MY STRINGS!
QUIT JERKIN' ON ME!
JUST LEAVE ME ALONE -
I WANNA BE FREE!

(Suddenly MILORD appears at the window. He taps on it,and she screams and drops the PUPPET in fear.)

MILORD: Forgive me, Your Highness, for alarming you, but I must speak with you.

BEAUTY: What do you want?

MILORD: May I come in?

BEAUTY: Tell me what you want.

MILORD: I have a gift for you.

BEAUTY: You already gave me one.

MILORD: Yes, I know, but this gift is not one I could give you in front of the others.

BEAUTY: Why not?

MILORD: Because no one is supposed to know about it. It’s a secret.

BEAUTY: I want you to go away.

MILORD: Your Highness, you don’t understand. There is a spell on this gift, and I must give it to you tonight, or it will be too late.

BEAUTY: Too late for what?

MILORD: This is a gift that will give you power over all men, but only if you learn to possess it while you are still a girl. Once you are a woman, it will be too late, and men will have control over you.

BEAUTY: Like my mother?

MILORD: Yes. And you wouldn’t want to be like her, would you?

BEAUTY: Let me see it.

MILORD: I need to come in. *(BEAUTY hesitates for a moment and then opens the window.MILORD steps into the room.)* What a charming room!

BEAUTY: So where is this… thing?

MILORD: It’s called a spindle. *(He takes it out of his pocket and hands it to her. The spindle is wrapped in a white silk handkerchief. BEAUTY unwraps*

it.) Careful! *(She looks up.)* You don’t want to hurt yourself. *(She holds up the naked spindle.)* You’ve never seen one before, have you?

BEAUTY: No.

MILORD: I’m not surprised. You see, your mother outlawed them right after you were born.

BEAUTY: Why?

MILORD: Because she didn’t want any competition.

BEAUTY: I don’t understand.

MILORD: The spindle is used for making wool. It’s quite an art—spinning and weaving. Your mother used to be very good at it. But as she got older, she began to lose her talents with the spindle. And that is when she outlawed them.

BEAUTY: *(Skeptical.)* And this is supposed to give me power over men?

MILORD: Oh, yes. You see, your mother didn’t start early enough.

BEAUTY: So how does it work?

MILORD: Imagine that you have a piece of wool in this hand… *(He takes her hand.)*… and then you would comb it over the spindle, like this… Over and over… Here… like this… *(He takes her hand.)* That’s right. A little faster. That’s right. It has a rhythm. And faster… Hold it firmly. That’s right… good girl… good girl…

BEAUTY: You’re hurting my hand.

MILORD: *(Ignoring her and closing his eyes.)* Faster… A little faster…

BEAUTY: Let go!

MILORD: Just a little more… There! *(He jams her hand down over the point of the spindle. She screams in shock.)*

BEAUTY: My hand!

MILORD: *(Opening his eyes.)* It's all right. Just a little blood. You did that very well. Yes, very well. Better than your mother. *(He kisses the wound.)* You must be tired now. Are you feeling sleepy?

BEAUTY: *(Slipping into a trance.)* Yes, a little… The spindle—

MILORD: I have it. You'd like to practice with it again some time, wouldn't you?

BEAUTY: Ye… yes.

MILORD: *(Stroking her hair.)* Yes, of course you would. But now you must go to sleep and forget all about this. You'll do that, won't you—? Forget that I came to the window. Forget that you've seen the spindle. Forget the blood. You'll forget everything, won't you, Beauty? *(She begins to collapse, and he catches her in his arms.)* You'll forget everything from now on… *(He laughs as he picks her up and carries her to the bed. The PUPPET convulses.)*

Blackout

End of Act

ACT II

Scene 1

Lights come up on BEAUTY's bedroom. It's morning, and BEAUTY lies sleeping on the bed. The PUPPET is in a heap in the corner. The windows are closed. A knocking is heard at the bedroom door.

DOKO: *(Calling softly from offstage.)* Beauty… Beauty… *(DOKO opens the door softly. Seeing BEAUTY, she approaches the bed quietly.)* Beauty… *(She shakes her gently. BEAUTY rolls over.)* Beauty, wake up… *(She shakes her again. BEAUTY opens her eyes and moans.)* It's about what happened last night. *(BEAUTY sits up and rubs her face.)* Beauty, I have to talk to you.

BEAUTY: *(Turning to her.)* What time is it?

DOKO: I don't know. It's early, I guess. I was awake all night.

BEAUTY: *(Irritated.)* Why didn't you let me sleep?

DOKO: Because I have to talk to you.

BEAUTY: Well, go ahead. *(She gets out of bed.)*

DOKO: You slept with your clothes on.

BEAUTY: I guess I was tired. *(She crosses to the window and opens it.)*

DOKO: Beauty, I need to talk to you.

BEAUTY: *(Looking out over the balcony.)* I said go ahead.

DOKO: But you're not even looking at me.

BEAUTY: *(Sitting down and facing her.)* All right. Talk.

DOKO: *(Disconcerted.)* Well, it's about the kiss…

BEAUTY: What kiss?

DOKO: You asked me to kiss you.

BEAUTY: I did not.

DOKO: Yes, you did. You were standing right here, and I was over there, and we had been arguing about the puppet theatre—

BEAUTY: Well, I don't remember.

DOKO: You don't remember? How can you not remember?

BEAUTY: I don't know. I just don't. *(A sudden thought.)* My hair! It must be a mess…

DOKO: Beauty, you asked me to kiss you last night, and I did, and then you asked me to kiss you like in the fairy tales, and we did—and now you say you don't remember it, and you want to talk about your hair!

BEAUTY: Well, it *is* a mess…

DOKO: What's the matter with you? You're different.

BEAUTY: I'm tired.

DOKO: No, you're different. You won't look at me, you don't remember—

BEAUTY: I just got up!

DOKO: No, you're different. And what did you do to the puppet? She's all tangled. *(DOKO lifts her up. The PUPPET's hands are bloody. DOKO yells.)*

BEAUTY: What? What's the matter now?

DOKO: What did you do to my puppet? There's blood on her hands!

BEAUTY: Let me see. *(She looks.)* That's not blood. It must be red paint or something. Somebody's idea of a joke or something.

DOKO: It wasn't there last night. You must have done it.

BEAUTY: Why would I put red paint on your puppet?

DOKO: I don't know, but I'm getting out of here.

BEAUTY: But aren't we going to look at wagons?

DOKO: No! I don't want to go anywhere with you. And I'm taking my puppet.

BEAUTY: But you gave it to me!

DOKO: Well, I'm taking it back. *(She lifts the PUPPET in a fireman's carry.)*

BEAUTY: Doko!

DOKO: Don't touch me! Stay over there! *(She exits with the PUPPET. After a moment, BEAUTY crosses to her mirror, yawning, and begins to fiddle with her hair.)*

Blackout

End of Scene

ACT II

Scene 2

Lights come up on DOKO's cottage. MARY is mixing something in a cauldron on the table. ANDREA is on the floor repairing the leg on the broken stool. MARY is reading an incantation from an enormous spell book.

MARY: *(Reciting.)* "Whisker of a favorite cat…" *(ANDREA, listening, shakes her head in disbelief at MARY's foolishness.)* "Toenail of a cross-eyed bat—"

ANDREA: A "cross-eyed bat?"

MARY: *(Ignoring her.)* "Feather from old goosey-gander, and just a pinch of hedgehog dander—"

ANDREA: *(Throwing down the hammer.) "Hedgehog dander?"*

MARY: *(Ignoring her, she dips her hand into the cauldron and begins to sprinkle water in a circle around her.)*
"Witch-away, witch-away, witch-away all…
Witch-away, witch-away, witch-away—"
(She begins to walk in circles about the cottage, sprinkling as she goes.)

ANDREA: *(With infinite patience.)* Mary, what are you doing?

MARY: *(Ignoring her, she casts some droplets in ANDREA's direction.)*
"Witch-away, witch-away, witch-away all…
Witch-away, witch-away, witch-away—"

ANDREA: Hey, cut it out!

MARY: *(Circling ANDREA and sprinkling her from all directions.)*
"Witch-away, witch-away, witch-away all…
Witch-away, witch-away, witch-away—"

ANDREA: Hey, I said knock it off!

MARY: *(Sprinkling right in ANDREA's face.)* This will get rid of your evil spirits:
"Witch-away, witch-away—"

ANDREA: *(Grabbing her wrist.)* Witch-away, yourself! (*She splashes MARY back.)*

MARY: *(Aggressively splashing.)*
"Witch-away, witch-away—"

ANDREA: *(Ducking behind the stool.)* Witch-away! *(MARY comes too close with the cauldron, and the two godmothers resort to an all-out water battle. It ends when ANDREA, soaked, douses MARY with what's left in the cauldron.)*

MARY: Oh, now look what you've done!

ANDREA: You started it.

MARY: And now I can't finish the exorcism.

ANDREA: *(Going back to the stool repair.)* Good.

MARY: That's easy for you to say, because you're not the one with the haunted house!

ANDREA: Mary, Doko's cottage is *not* haunted. Some poor animal got herself trapped in here and tore the place up looking for a way to get out, that's all.

MARY: *(Packing her herbs.)* Ha!

ANDREA: You can't blame everything in life on evil spirits. *(MARY ignores her.)* Well, you can't. It's like the weather. Sometimes it rains and sometimes it doesn't. *(MARY ignores her.)* Hey, I'm talking to you!

MARY: All I can say is the fish doesn’t know that it’s wet.

ANDREA: *(Stymied.)* What?

MARY: Never mind.

ANDREA: No, you said “A fish doesn’t know that it’s wet.” What does that mean?

MARY: Nothing.

ANDREA: Mary Treemoderly, you tell me what you mean by that!

MARY: I mean that here you are in a cottage positively reeking of magic, with evil spirits practically leaping out of the cupboards at you, and all you can talk about is… disoriented field mice!

ANDREA: I didn’t say it was field mice!

MARY: Look at you! Just look at you!

ANDREA: What?!

MARY: Here you are virtually *swimming* in a sea of psychic phenomenon, pushed and pulled along by metaphysical currents—

ANDREA: Where?

MARY: Where? Everywhere! Why Andrea Popodopolis, there is not one move you make, one sentence you speak, one thought you think, that has not been influenced by curses laid on your ancestors before you were born, spells cast on you when you were a baby, and hexes you have brought down on your own head through your psychic blunderings!

ANDREA: “Psychic blunderings?”

MARY: Silence! The spirits have suffered enough of your arrogant blasphemy! *(Lowering her voice.)* Andrea Popodopolis, you are a fish so surrounded by water, she doesn't know that she's wet!

ANDREA: I know when I'm we—

MARY: *(Collecting her paraphernalia and heading for the door.)* Oh, no you don't, and you wouldn't know a banshee if it was staring you in the face! *(She flings open the door, and almost runs into DOKO who is standing in the doorway. She screams and grabs ANDREA.)* AAHHHH! *(Recovering.)* Doko, you scared me half to death! *(DOKO doesn't say anything. She enters and crosses to the bed. MARY and ANDREA watch her.)* What are you doing home so early? I thought you and your friend were going to go pick out a wagon this morning.

DOKO: We were.

ANDREA: Didn't you find one you liked?

DOKO: I didn't get the wagon, because there isn't going to be any puppet theatre. And Betheen was right about Beauty. She's not my friend. *(DOKO sits disconsolately on her bed. MARY and ANDREA exchange a look.)*

MARY: Did you and Beauty have a fight?

DOKO: I don't want to talk about it.

MARY: Well, I'm sure it's just a little spat. She'll be your friend again by tomorrow.

DOKO: No, it's never going to be like that again. You don't understand.

MARY: *(Offended.)* Oh, I see. I guess I never had any friends, so I wouldn't know.

DOKO: This is different. It's a different kind of friend.

ANDREA: Doko, did something happen between you and Beauty?

DOKO: Well, *she* doesn't think so. *(There is a long pause, as MARY and ANDREA look at DOKO. DOKO looks at the floor.)* I kissed her. *(MARY and ANDREA exchange a look.)* But *she* asked me to!

MARY: *(Starting to embrace DOKO.)* Oh, honey… *ANDREA cuts in, indicating that MARY should let her handle the situation. MARY retreats, and ANDREA pulls the repaired stool up next to the bed for a little butch-to-butch talk. She looks at DOKO and then looks away. After a long pause, she sighs and clamps her hands on her legs.)*

ANDREA: Yeah.

DOKO: *(After a pause, fighting back tears.)* Yeah.

ANDREA: *(After another long pause, she nods, sighs, and looks away again.)* Yeah.

DOKO: *(Nodding through her tears.)* Yeah.

ANDREA: *(Gazing off into the distance.)* I had a best friend once.

DOKO: *(Deliberately not looking at ANDREA.)* Did you kiss her?

ANDREA: *(Still gazing.)* Yeah.

DOKO: Did she like it?

ANDREA: Oh, yeah… *(Finally looking at DOKO.)* And then she didn't.

DOKO: *(Returning the look.)* Yeah.

ANDREA AND DOKO: *(Both nodding and looking away.)* Yeah. *(Suddenly BETHEEN bursts in.)*

BETHEEN: *(Scolding.)* Doko, what is that puppet doing out in the yard?

DOKO: *(Defensive.)* I brought it home. Me and Beauty had a fight.

BETHEEN: Why are the puppet's hands all red?

DOKO: I don't know. Beauty must have done something to it last night.

BETHEEN: But didn't you spend the night with her?

DOKO: No.

BETHEEN: *(Alarmed.)* You didn't?

DOKO: *(Angry.)* No, I didn't! What's the big deal?

BETHEEN: *(An abrupt shift in her manner.)* Nothing! Nothing at all… Ooops! It's late, isn't it?

DOKO: It's nine in the morning.

BETHEEN: Oh… then it's early… good. Good! Then there's still time to… do my errands! Yes, my errands! We all have to do our errands, don't we? Well, now… if you will all excuse me… I must be off… to do my errands! *(She dashes out the door.)*

DOKO: Why is she acting so weird?

ANDREA: Because she's Betheen.

MARY: Doko… did you say the puppet's hands were all red?

DOKO: Yeah. I guess it was somebody's idea of a practical joke.

MARY: And you say you didn't spend the night with Beauty?

DOKO: No. *(Embarrassed.)* She asked me to kiss her, and I got confused about things and went home.

MARY: But the next day, she didn’t remember?

ANDREA: She *said* she didn’t remember.

MARY: *(To ANDREA.)* But maybe she really didn’t. *(To DOKO.)* Maybe she was pricked by a spindle and she was under a magic spell.

ANDREA: Oh, for crying out loud—

MARY: I’m serious! That’s *why* she couldn’t remember!

ANDREA: Don’t lie to Doko!

MARY: I’m not lying!

ANDREA: *(To DOKO.)* Listen—Beauty got scared when you kissed her. Lots of girls get scared when another girl kisses them.

DOKO: *(To MARY.)* If she had been pricked, she would have fallen asleep for a hundred years.

MARY: Not necessarily. In the old spell books “falling asleep” just meant going into some kind of altered state. And “a hundred years” was just the old way of saying “for a long time.”

DOKO: Well, she *was* acting strange.

MARY: *(To ANDREA.)* You see?

ANDREA: Mary, what are you saying? Do you want Doko to go through life believing that every girl who gets scared about kissing another girl is just under some spindle spell?

MARY: Well, maybe they are.

ANDREA: I can’t believe—what are you doing? *(MARY has crossed to her spell book and is thumbing through it.)*

MARY: I’m looking up spindle spells.

ANDREA: Let me see! *(Crossing behind her and reading.)* “Wave the womb of a warthog over the afflicted area—”

MARY: That’s for “splinters!” Here—“Spindle spells…” *(She takes the book and reads.)* “If a young girl is pricked by a spindle before she reaches sexual maturity, she will come under the curse of the spindle spell… ” *(She looks up triumphantly at ANDREA.)*
DOKO: Go on.

MARY: “… curse of the spindle spell… Reactions may vary according to individuals and circumstances. While some girls do fall into an actual coma, others undergo sudden marked changes in personality, characterized by loss of interest in former pursuits and companions—”

DOKO: That’s just what happened!

MARY: “… and accompanied by the onset of a morbid preoccupation with trivial banalities.”

DOKO: Like her stupid hair!

MARY: *(Looking up at ANDREA in triumph.)* You see?

DOKO: *(Leaning over the book.)* Does it have a cure?

MARY: You mean a “counter-spell?”

DOKO: Does it?

MARY: *(Running her finger down the page.)* Hmmm… hmmm… hmmm… “Counterspell!”

DOKO: *(Very excited.)* What does it say?

MARY: *(Reading.)* “The only known antidote to a spindle spell curse is a kiss by the sleeper’s own true love.” *(MARY closes the book slowly. There is a grim silence among the three. Finally DOKO speaks.)*

DOKO: *(Irritated.)* Whoever *that* is.

ANDREA: *(Exploding.)* What a load of crap!

MARY: It is not!

ANDREA: Oh, Mary, Beauty didn’t remember the kiss, because she didn’t want to remember it. She’s supposed to marry some prince and be a queen someday, and falling in love with Doko was just going to mess up the plan. It has nothing to do with warthogs or—

MARY: *(Cutting in.)* That was “splinters.”

ANDREA: Doko’s got to face the facts… that some girls just don’t have the courage to fall in love with other girls.

MARY: Well, it’s very odd that this all happened on the last night of the spindle curse, on the Princess’ sixteenth birthday, on the very night when Doko was supposed to be with her but wasn’t, *and* how do you explain the blood on the puppet’s hands?

DOKO: Yeah, what about that?

ANDREA: *(To DOKO.)* You said it was paint.

MARY: *I* say it was blood.

ANDREA: Well, let’s go see. Where’s the puppet?

DOKO: I left it outside, by the door. I’ll get it. *(She exits.)*

MARY: *(To ANDREA.)* I'll have you know that I have kissed a number of girls in my time, and had my heart broken just like Doko. I'm not as much of a fuddy-duddy as you may think.

ANDREA: *(Defensive.)* I didn't say you were a fuddy-duddy. I just don't think magic has anything to do with it.

MARY: *(Posing a flirtatious challenge.)* You don't think there's magic when two girls kiss?

ANDREA: *(Suddenly flustered.)* I didn't say that! *(Just then DOKO rushes in.)*

DOKO: She's gone! My puppet's gone!

ANDREA: Are you sure?

DOKO: I left it right here—*(She indicates the side of the door.)* Right next to the door. Somebody's taken my puppet!

MARY: But it was just here…

ANDREA: Come on! Let's find whoever took it. They can't have gotten very far! *(The three of them exit. There is a moment of silence,and then BETHEEN pokes her head through the window to see if the coast is clear. She appears at the door, dragging the PUPPET behind her.)*

BETHEEN: *(Talking to the PUPPET as she drags it.)* I warned you… I warned you, but you wouldn't listen. Oh, no, you had to go and spoil everything, didn't you? Well, it's not going to happen again. *(She drags the PUPPET to the fireplace and begins to shove her into it.)* Just had to show everybody your hands, didn't you? Well, you see what came of it, don't you? Did you really think they would believe you? *(Pushing and shoving.)* I told you not to make trouble, but you just wouldn't listen to me. You just had to go and do things your way, didn't you? Well, I hope it was worth it, because it's the last time you're ever going to make trouble for anyone again, young lady. *(Shoving.)* The very… last… time. *(With a final shove,*

BETHEEN crosses to the wood next to the fireplace. She picks up some small kindling and begins to place it under and around the PUPPET, who is all jumbled into the fireplace. Suddenly DOKO enters.)

DOKO: What's going on? *(BETHEEN jumps.)*

BETHEEN: Doko!

DOKO: What are you doing with my puppet?

BETHEEN: *(Speaking rapidly, but in a low voice.)* Doko, listen to me. I have to tell you about your puppet. It's not a puppet at all. It's an evil spirit —*(ANDREA and MARY appear in the doorway, but BETHEEN doesn't notice them. She is desperate to convince DOKO.)*

DOKO: Now you're talking like Mary.

BETHEEN: Mary's evil spirits are make-believe, but this one is real. You can see for yourself! Look at the blood on its hands. That's not paint. That's real blood.

DOKO: Where did it come from?

BETHEEN: From a magic spell! This puppet has been enchanted by an evil sorcerer. She's the one who wrecked your cabin yesterday morning. Doko, this puppet is evil, and it must be destroyed!

DOKO: But my mother gave it to me. It used to be hers—

BETHEEN: And it plagued her life as much as it's going to plague yours. Destroy it, before it destroys you! Trust me, Doko. Here, help me light the fire. *(She holds out a stick of wood to DOKO. DOKO begins to take the wood, but then freezes. She grabs BETHEEN's wrist.)*

DOKO: What's this?

BETHEEN: *(Terrified.)* What?

DOKO: This—on your hand! *(Looking at the other hand.)*
And this! On the other one! *(She grabs her other wrist.)*

BETHEEN: What? *(Struggling to pull her hands away.)*

DOKO: These are scars, aren't they? Scars where you were pricked by a spindle—pricked just like Beauty was! That's why you didn't want me to tell her, isn't it? You have spindle scars!

BETHEEN: No! No! It's the puppet! We have to burn the puppet! *(Still struggling.)*

DOKO: You're under a spell! You've been under a spell all your life, haven't you? What is it *you* can't remember? And why is there blood on the puppet's hands? You never told me that, did you? Is it because the puppet remembers what you don't? Because the puppet is trying to tell the story you're all lying about? Get out! Get out of my house!

BETHEEN: Doko—!

DOKO: *(Threatening her with the stick of wood.)* Now! *(BETHEEN crosses to the door, and sees ANDREA and MARY for the first time.)*

BETHEEN: Oh! *(MARY steps aside, and BETHEEN, covering her face in confusion, flees. Meanwhile, DOKO has crossed to the PUPPET in the fireplace. Tenderly, she gathers her into her arms and embraces her. She begins to rock the PUPPET as if she were a baby. MARY and ANDREA cross behind her, uncertain of what to do.)*

DOKO: I'm sorry. I didn't know… I didn't understand… *(MARY and ANDREA look at each other.)*

Blackout

End of Scene

ACT II

Scene 3

Lights come up on the Throne Room. The Throne is unoccupied, and the QUEEN's scepter lies across the seat. There is a small table next to the throne with a glass and a decanter. BEAUTY enters. She is wearing her mother's gown from the previous evening. (It doesn't need to fit.) She wanders over to the throne, picks up the scepter, and sits. She is absent-mindedly tasting the wine when her mother enters. The QUEEN is shocked to see her daughter on the throne. She hesitates before she speaks.

QUEEN: Beauty.

BEAUTY: *(Looking up, disinterested.)* Yes?

QUEEN: What are you doing on my throne?

BEAUTY: I was trying it out.

QUEEN: I see. And do you like it?

BEAUTY: *(Sipping the wine.)* It's not very comfortable.

QUEEN: Then perhaps you should step down.

BEAUTY: *(Not moving.)* If it was my throne, I would make it softer.

QUEEN: Is that my gown you're wearing?

BEAUTY: Yes.

QUEEN: Why?

BEAUTY: Because I needed something sophisticated, and all my dresses are too young.

QUEEN: “Too young?”

BEAUTY: *(Playing with the scepter.)* Yes. They’re for little girls.

QUEEN: Yesterday, they seemed to suit you.

BEAUTY: I didn’t know any better.

QUEEN: And to what may we attribute your sudden enlightenment?

BEAUTY: *(Exasperated, she finally confronts her mother.)* Mother, I’m a woman. I’m not a child anymore, and you can’t treat me like one.

QUEEN: It seems pretty childish to be playing dress-up with your mother’s clothes.

BEAUTY: *(Matter-of-factly.)* It isn’t dress-up if I look better in them than you.

QUEEN: And you think you do?

BEAUTY: Of course.

QUEEN: *(Taking the glass from her and setting it down.)* That’s enough, Beauty. You are not to wear my dresses.

BEAUTY: But, Mother —

QUEEN: *(Ousting her from the throne.)* And you are not to sit on my throne again, either. Do you understand? And I want you to take off that dress.

BEAUTY: *(Arguing with her across the throne.)* But what am I supposed to wear today? Milord is coming over and we’re—

QUEEN: *(Cutting her off.)* Milord?

BEAUTY: He wants me to see his paintings.

QUEEN: I won’t allow it.

BEAUTY: Mother, I’m sixteen.

QUEEN: I don’t care. You are not to go *anywhere* with that man. Do you understand? I forbid you to even speak to him. *(MILORD has appeared in the hall. BEAUTY sees him, but the QUEEN has her back to him.)*

MILORD: Am I interrupting something? *(The QUEEN turns and gasps.)*

BEAUTY: *(Smiling.)* Not at all, Milord. We were just discussing my visit to your castle.

QUEEN: Beauty, go to your room!

BEAUTY: Mother, you forget your manners.

QUEEN: I forget nothing. Go to your room—now!

MILORD: If I’m interrupting something—

BEAUTY: Not at all. I just need to fetch my cape. I’ll meet you in the courtyard—

QUEEN: *(Grabbing at her dress.)* Beauty—

BEAUTY: *(Staring at her mother.)* Mother! *(Embarrassed, the QUEEN lets go.)* Milord… *(BEAUTY nods and exits. After she has gone, MILORD turns to the QUEEN with a mocking smile.)*

QUEEN: What do you want?

MILORD: You haven’t changed.

QUEEN: Leave her alone.

MILORD: *(All innocence.)* She wanted to see my castle.

QUEEN: Leave her alone, or I will have you arrested.

MILORD: By whom?

QUEEN: The palace guards.

MILORD: Do you think they will arrest their commander-in-chief?

QUEEN: I think they will obey their Queen.

MILORD: Shall we see? *(The QUEEN doesn't move.)* You are, of course, invited to join us, if you'd care to. *(She doesn't respond.)* You were quite fond of my portrait gallery, as I remember.

QUEEN: I was a fool.

MILORD: Well, you certainly seemed to enjoy yourself at the time. *(The QUEEN slaps him. MILORD punches her in the jaw, knocking her to the floor. She lies there stunned, holding her jaw.)* Your Majesty! Are you all right? You seem to have lost your balance… Allow me to offer you my hand. *(He extends his hand with genuine concern.)* I hope that this incident is not indicative of a more serious condition.

QUEEN: *(Understanding perfectly.)* Not at all, Milord. *(She accepts his hand stiffly.)* I assure you, I'm quite recovered.

MILORD: Excellent! I'm gratified to hear it was only a temporary indisposition. Are you sure you won't join us?

QUEEN: No. Thank you.

MILORD: May I assure you that no effort will be spared to make the Princess' visit a pleasurable one? In fact, I shall see to it personally.

QUEEN: Yes, I’m sure you will. After all, she’s your daughter. *(MILORD smiles and kisses the QUEEN’s hand. He exits,leaving the QUEEN standing, her hand on her jaw.)*

Blackout

End of Scene

ACT II

Scene 4

Lights come up on DOKO's cottage, the same day. DOKO is packing a knapsack. The PUPPET is propped in a chair.

DOKO: Don't worry, we're leaving… *(Stuffing another shirt in.)*… We're getting out of here just as fast as I can pack… *(Pushing it down into the sack.)*… And we're never coming back. They're all liars. All of them… Betheen, and Beauty, and the Queen. And Mary and Andrea are just as bad, because they let the others get away with all their lies. We're going to go out in the woods… *(Stuffing another shirt.)*… and I'll build us a tree fort… *(More stuffing.)*… and we'll live on roots and berries, and it'll just be you and me, because you're the only friend I have left. You're the only one who's been with me ever since I was a baby, and you're the only one who knows the truth, even if you can't talk. And I don't care what the others say about you… I love you. *(Suddenly the PUPPET becomes animated. She crosses to DOKO and kisses her. DOKO is stunned.)*
You moved! You walked! You kissed me! You're… you're… alive! You… you… What are you doing? *(The PUPPET has taken a stick of burned wood from the fireplace and is drawing something on the floor.)* You're drawing something… *(DOKO crosses to her and watches.)* It's a puppet… ? *(The PUPPET points, shaking her head violently.)* A doll? *(The PUPPET shakes her head.)* A baby… ? *(The PUPPET nods enthusiastically.)* It's a baby. *(The PUPPET points to DOKO.)* Me? It's me? Me as a baby? *(The PUPPET nods and continues to draw.)* And there's a hand… my hand… And there's a spindle! You mean… ? *(DOKO studies her palms.)* But I… I don't remember… *(The PUPPET points to herself.) You! You* remember! You remember what happened to me! *(The PUPPET nods. DOKO takes her by the shoulders and speaks very earnestly.)* Tell me. I need to know. *(The two kneel down and put their heads together, studying the drawings.)*

Blackout

End of Scene

ACT II

Scene 5

Lights come up on the Throne Room, same day. The throne is unoccupied. MARY and ANDREA enter. They are arguing.

MARY: Now, you let me do the explaining.

ANDREA: I don’t know why I let you talk me into this.

MARY: Because the Princess Beauty is in trouble, and she’s our goddaughter’s best friend, and besides, it’s the right thing to do.

ANDREA: I don’t know about all this “spindle spell” business. It still seems to me that girls just start to change when they get to be a certain age.

MARY: *Some* girls. *We* didn’t change, and that’s because we never got pricked! It’s a spell, and we need to warn the Queen.

ANDREA: But what if she doesn’t believe us?

MARY: *(Knowingly.)* She’ll believe us.

ANDREA: How do you know?

MARY: Because I am wearing the Sacred Umbilicus of Tobol.

ANDREA: The *what*?

MARY: *(She pulls out a hideously ugly, evil -smelling object, which is tied to a string around her neck.)* The Sacred Umbilicus of Tobol.

ANDREA: That is the ugliest thing I’ve ever seen.

MARY: Well, it’s not supposed to be pretty. It’s the dried umbilical cord from—

ANDREA: No! Don’t tell me! I don’t want to know.

MARY: Well, anyway, it commands people’s attention.

ANDREA: No doubt. *(Watching MARY tuck it back in.)* Mary, did it ever occur to you that you don’t need all these spells and charms?

MARY: What do you mean?

ANDREA: I mean, that you could get what you wanted just by your own actions.

MARY: Why would I want to do that?

ANDREA: Because… I don’t know… it’s kind of a rush.

MARY: Shhh! Here she comes! *(The Queen enters nursing her jaw. She stops abruptly and drops her hand when she sees ANDREA and MARY.)*

QUEEN: What are *you* doing here?

MARY: We were waiting to see you, Your Majesty.

QUEEN: Well, I’m not holding court today. I left orders I was not to be disturbed.

MARY: But this is very urgent.

QUEEN: Yes, everybody’s business is urgent, isn’t it… ? Except the Queen’s. Get out!

MARY: But this is about your daughter.

QUEEN: Get out!

MARY: But Your Majesty —

QUEEN: Do you want me to call the guards?

ANDREA: Mary—Quick! Show her your umbilical cord!

QUEEN: What?

ANDREA: The Sacred Umbilicus of…

MARY: Tobol! *(She pulls it out.)*

QUEEN: Oh, my god! What is that?

ANDREA: That's just what I said.

MARY: It's the umbilical cord from—

QUEEN: Never mind! I don't want to know!

ANDREA: That's just what I said.

MARY: The reason I'm wearing it is because your daughter, the Princess Beauty, is in grave danger.

QUEEN: *(Uncomfortable.)* I don't know what you mean.

MARY: I mean she's been pricked by a spindle and she's under the curse of the spindle spell!

QUEEN: That's ridiculous! There hasn't been a spindle in the kingdom for sixteen years! Beauty doesn't even know what one is.

MARY: All the same, she's under a spindle spell.

QUEEN: *(Very defensive.)* How do you know? Have you seen her?

ANDREA: *(Stepping forward.)* Doko has.

QUEEN: Doko! You mean you take the word of a *child*?

MARY: She's our goddaughter.

QUEEN: Just like Doko to go making up stories so she can be the hero. She's always been jealous of Beauty.

ANDREA: Doko never lies!

QUEEN: Well, I'll have you know I saw Beauty myself this morning, and she was acting like a perfectly normal sixteen-year old girl.

MARY: Doko says she acted like she didn't know her, like she couldn't remember they were even friends.

QUEEN: Well, maybe that's because Beauty has outgrown Doko. Your goddaughter is just going to have to learn to accept the facts of life about her social station. She can't really expect a princess to want to spend her time with a scullery maid!

ANDREA: *(Getting in the QUEEN's face.)* Doko's just as good as Beauty!

QUEEN: *(Patronizing her.)* "The fruit never falls far from the tree."

ANDREA: What's that supposed to mean? *(The QUEEN smiles and lifts a glass of wine to drink. ANDREA turns to MARY.)* What does she mean by "the fruit never falls far from the tree?"

MARY: *(Outraged.)* She means that when Beauty grows up, she's going to be an ugly old, wine-guzzling harpy just like her mother! *(She snatches the glass of wine from the QUEEN's hand and throws it in her face.)*

QUEEN: *(Shielding her face with her hands.)* Oh! How dare you!

ANDREA: Look!

MARY: What?

ANDREA: Look at her hands! She has scars!

MARY: Spindle scars! *(The QUEEN closes her fists.)*

ANDREA: The Queen has spindle scars!

QUEEN: Guards! Guards! Arrest these women!

MARY: No wonder she can't protect her daughter!

ANDREA: *(Pulling MARY.)* Come on, Mary! Let's get out of here!

QUEEN: Guards!

MARY: *(To the QUEEN.)* That'll teach you to say bad things about our goddaughter!

ANDREA: Mary, let's go!

QUEEN: Guards!

MARY: *(Waving her fists.)* Next time I won't be so nice!

ANDREA: Mary!

MARY: *(To ANDREA.)* You're right, it *is* a rush… *(ANDREA hustles MARY out of the Throne Room, just as the GUARDS enter.)*

QUEEN: Arrest them! Arrest them! Treason! *(The GUARDS exit in the wrong direction.) TREASON!*

Blackout

End of Scene

ACT II

Scene 6

Lights come up on Milord's gallery. BEAUTY is walking from frame to frame, examining the paintings. MILORD stands in the middle of the hall watching her, like a spider in the center of his web.

BEAUTY: *(Turning to him.)* They're all such beautiful girls.

MILORD: Why would I want to paint the ugly ones?

BEAUTY: *(Looking at another painting.)* My mother was beautiful when you painted her.

MILORD: Yes, your mother was beautiful. *(BEAUTY moves to another painting without turning around.)* You look something like her at that age. *(BEAUTY turns.)* Except the shoulders… Your shoulders are not so square as your mother's. Do you mind? *(Maintaining an air of professional detachment, he crosses to her and touches her shoulders, slipping her sleeves down over them.)* Yes… rounder, softer. Definitely different.

BEAUTY: Are they prettier than hers?

MILORD: *(Smiling.)* Different. A different kind of beauty.

BEAUTY: Will you paint me?

MILORD: I don't think your mother would approve.

BEAUTY: I don't care. I don't need her permission.

MILORD: A portrait?

BEAUTY: No. I want to be painted like the others. *(She indicates the paintings in the gallery.)*

MILORD: But, Your Highness, these are all nudes.

BEAUTY: That's what I want.

MILORD: Are you sure?

BEAUTY: Yes. I insist. In fact, I command you. When can we start?

MILORD: We can begin now, if you like.

BEAUTY: Good. Where can I change?

MILORD: *(Pointing off stage.)* There's a little room in there. *(BEAUTY exits.)* I'll set up my easel. *(MILORD exits in the other direction. DOKO enters the gallery. She hides herself behind a pillar. MILORD returns with his easel and begins to set it up.)*

BEAUTY: *(Offstage.)* Will it take long?

MILORD: That will depend.

BEAUTY: *(Offstage.)* On what?

MILORD: On how well you inspire me.

BEAUTY: *(Offstage.)* And what does it take to inspire you?

MILORD: *(Smiling to himself.)* Every girl is different. *(BEAUTY emerges wearing a robe.)*

BEAUTY: Where do you want me to pose?

MILORD: Anywhere. Why don't you see what feels comfortable. I need to get my paints… If Your Highness will excuse me. *(He exits. DOKO signals to BEAUTY.)*

DOKO: Psst! Beauty!

BEAUTY: Doko! What are you doing here?

DOKO: Listen, Beauty, you've got to trust me. You're in a lot of trouble, and I can help you.

BEAUTY: What are you talking about?

DOKO: Shhh! Keep your voice down. Now, listen—You're under an evil spell—

BEAUTY: What?

DOKO: SHHHH! An evil spell. It's a curse that you don't even know anything about, called a spindle spell—

BEAUTY: Doko, is this one of your puppet stories?

DOKO: Yes—no! I'm not making it up, if that's what you mean. This is real! You got pricked last night by a spindle—

BEAUTY: What's a spindle?

DOKO: I'll explain later—Right now we've got to get you out of here.

BEAUTY: But Milord is going to paint me.

DOKO: No! You can't let him do that.

BEAUTY: But it was my idea.

DOKO: No, it wasn't!

BEAUTY: Yes, it was! In fact, I ordered him to.

DOKO: You just *think* it was your idea, but it's the spell you're under. It makes you say and do things you would never do if you hadn't been pricked

by the spindle before your sixteenth—

BEAUTY: *(Annoyed.)* What's a spindle?

DOKO: Never mind. We haven't got time for this now. You've just got to trust me. I know how to break the spell, and you've got to let me show you.

BEAUTY: Well?

DOKO: You have to let me kiss you.

BEAUTY: What *is* this with you and kissing? First, you think *I* kissed you when I didn't, and now *you* want to kiss *me*—

DOKO: No! It's not what I want! It's in the spell book—I swear it! You have to be kissed by your true love—

BEAUTY: And that's you?

DOKO: No, no! The spell book sometimes says things kind of funny. Like "falling asleep" means being in a trance, and "a hundred years" just means "for a long time." And your "own true love" is who you were before you got pricked, only when you're under a spindle spell you can't remember, only sometimes things can remind you, and that's why I thought if I could kiss you the way my puppet kissed me—

BEAUTY: Your *puppet* kissed you?

DOKO: Oh, this is hopeless! Just let me kiss you, so you can remember who you are.

BEAUTY: Will that make you happy?

DOKO: Yes.

BEAUTY: All right. *(DOKO starts to kiss her, but MILORD is heard entering. DOKO ducks behind the pillar again.)*

MILORD: *(Entering.)* So… you've decided to pose next to the pillar?

BEAUTY: *(Off guard.)* Yes… I guess so. If that's okay.

MILORD: Lovely. *(He is setting up his paints, as DOKO and BEAUTY are signaling.)* Oh, I have forgotten my palette knife. If Your Highness will excuse me… *(BEAUTY nods quickly, and MILORD exits.)*

DOKO: Okay, now, quick! We have to kiss.

BEAUTY: I don't want to. *(Pulling away self-consciously.)* This just feels stupid.

DOKO: No, you have to! *(She grabs Beauty's sleeve.)*

BEAUTY: I said no!

DOKO: You have to! *(The girls are wrestling when MILORD re-enters.)*

MILORD: Well, well, well… Our little messenger boy who turned out to be a girl. And what is this? Another invitation from the Queen?

DOKO: Beauty, come on!

BEAUTY: No! *(To MILORD.)* She thinks I'm under some kind of spell or something. *(To DOKO.)* Let go of me!

DOKO: No!

MILORD: *(Drawing his sword.)* I think it would be a very good idea to do as Her Highness commands.

DOKO: *(To MILORD.)* I'm not letting go, and I'm not leaving her here with you. I know who you are and I know what you've done. *(Suddenly BETHEEN enters.)*

BETHEEN: Doko! *(DOKO takes advantage of the moment to grab MILORD's sword.)*

DOKO: Ha! Now let's see who's in charge! Where's your spindle now? You pricked me with it when I was still a baby, didn't you? And you came into her bedroom last night, didn't you? *(Indicating BEAUTY.)* You and your big spindle. And you got her to touch it, didn't you? And then you pricked her, and you thought nobody would know, because she wouldn't remember, but you figured wrong, because there was somebody in that room. My puppet saw what you did last night, just like she saw what you did ten years ago, and she told me everything, and now I'm going to prick *you* and you're not going to remember it either, because you're going to be dead!

BETHEEN: Doko, don't!

DOKO: Why not?

BETHEEN: Because… he's your father.

DOKO: *(Turning to BETHEEN, stunned.)* What?

MILORD: *(Taking advantage of her confusion to seize the sword.)* Now, my little friend, I think you have lost your advantage.

DOKO: *(To BETHEEN.)* Is it true?

BETHEEN: I'm sorry. I thought it was better not to tell you.

DOKO: No! No! It's not true! You said my father was a soldier… *(BETHEEN nods.)* Oh…

MILORD: *(He has crossed to the wings.)* Guards! Guards!

BEAUTY: What are you going to do?

MILORD: I’m sorry, Your Majesty, but I will have to arrest your little friend, and her mother.

BETHEEN: Her godmother. Her real mother was the queen’s lady-in-waiting. You don’t even remember her, do you? She gave up her life for you, and you don’t even remember her!

MILORD: Why should I believe your stories?
BEAUTY: *(To MILORD.)* But you’re not going to arrest Doko?

MILORD: Do you think I should give her another chance to kill me? *(Just then, three GUARDS enter.)* Arrest those two! *(Suddenly ANDREA and MARY appear in the doorway.)*

ANDREA: Hold it, right there! Touch either one of them, and you’ll have me to answer to!

MARY: *(Pushing up her sleeves.) And* me!

MILORD: Seize them!

(One of the GUARDS comes after ANDREA, and while he is engaged with her, MARY breaks a picture frame over his head. DOKO takes advantage of the confusion to break away from her GUARD and hit BETHEEN’s captor over the head with another frame. BETHEEN kicks him in the shins. As the fighting goes on, BEAUTY retreats behind her pillar. MILORD draws his sword on ANDREA, who has her back turned to him, but DOKO kicks it out of his hands. ANDREA throws him and DOKO picks up the sword.)

MILORD: *(Taunting her.)* You can’t kill me—I’m your father.

DOKO: *(Driving the sword with some difficulty into his chest.)* Not… any… more! *(Just then, the QUEEN enters.)*

QUEEN: *(She sees MARY and ANDREA.)* There they are! You won’t get away this time! *(MILORD groans and rolls over dead. The QUEEN sees him.)* Oh, my god! It’s Milord! *(Crossing to him.)* He’s dead! *(To DOKO*

who stands by him with the sword.) What have you done? *(She bends over the body, wringing her hands.)* Ahhh… He's dead! You've killed Milord! You've killed the commander of the army! They'll hang me! They'll hang me for treason! Oh, what have you done!

BEAUTY: *(Deeply distressed by her mother's terror.)* Mother—!

QUEEN: *(Delirious.)* He's dead! They killed him! And everyone will think I did it! They're going to hang me! Oh... he's dead! *(She clutches deliriously at the hem of BEAUTY's robe.)*

BEAUTY: Mother…

DOKO: Beauty, we can leave now. We can go where no one will know you. *(BEAUTY looks at DOKO.)* Please! We can do it! We can leave! We can still do it! Please!

BEAUTY: *(Looking at her mother who is still clutching her robe.)* But, what about Mother…

MARY: *(To DOKO.)* Her mother has spindle scars.

ANDREA: We've seen them!

DOKO: Beauty, your mother is dangerous to you. She has been pricked, too.

BEAUTY: I don't understand what you're talking about.

DOKO: Her hands! Look at your mother's hands—Look at your own! *(BEAUTY starts to look at her own hands, but the QUEEN jumps up and grabs them.)*

QUEEN: Beauty, they're all against us! All of them! That's because they're jealous! I was a fool to let you play with a cook's helper. She's out to ruin you—and ruin me, too. Trust me, Beauty! I'm your mother! *(BEAUTY looks at DOKO.)* Who nurtured you with her own flesh and blood? Look at

me, Beauty! Look at me! I'm your mother! The only one you'll ever have! Your own flesh and blood!

BEAUTY: *(Turning back to DOKO.)* Doko…

DOKO: Look at her hands!

QUEEN: Listen to her! Do you know what your little friend has just done? She's murdered your father! Yes, Milord was your father! There! Now, you know. And you want to run off with the girl who murdered him!

BEAUTY: You mean—

DOKO: Her hands! Look at her hands, Beauty! She's dangerous!

QUEEN: She's killed your father and now she's trying to separate you from your mother—so you'll be an orphan like her. A poor, penniless orphan. That's been her plan all along, to get you under her power—

ANDREA: You liar!

MARY: I warned you not to say anything bad about our goddaughter! *(She starts to cross toward the QUEEN.)*

BEAUTY: *(Suddenly picking up MILORD's sword.)* Stop! Don't touch my mother!

DOKO: Beauty!

BEAUTY: *(To her mother, gaining confidence as she speaks.)* I'll protect you. Nobody's going to hurt you. We're going to have a big state funeral and we will invite all of the officers in the army and all of the lords and all of the neighboring kings, and you will give a speech in front of all the people about how generous and how kind Milord was, and we will declare a month of mourning and order a huge monument to be erected in the palace courtyard in memory of Milord, and every year, on this date, we will both come and lay flowers at the feet of his statue, for all of the people to see—

DOKO: Beauty!

BEAUTY: *(To the GODMOTHERS.)* And you three are banished from the kingdom. I give you forty-eight hours to leave, and then if you are found within our borders, I will have you arrested and executed for treason.

DOKO: But—

BEAUTY: And you, too, Doko. I give you forty-eight hours.

DOKO: Beauty…

BEAUTY: *(With the voice of her new-found authority.)* Good-bye, Doko. *(DOKO hesitates for a moment and then, with a cry of anguish, runs out of the hall. ANDREA runs after her. MARY takes a step towards the QUEEN, but BETHEEN restrains her, and they exit. MARY turns for one final obscene gesture.)*

QUEEN: *(Turning to BEAUTY.)* My baby… My baby girl… *(BEAUTY allows her mother to embrace her.)*

Blackout

End of Scene

ACT II

Scene 7

Lights come up on Doko's cottage. DOKO is sitting on her bed, staring ahead at the wall. The PUPPET is propped up in a corner, immobile. A soft knock is heard. DOKO doesn't move. The knock comes again, and she still doesn't move. Finally ANDREA pushes the door open.

ANDREA: Doko? *(DOKO looks at her and then back at the wall. ANDREA sighs and crosses to where she can sit and face DOKO.)* So… Are you ready?

DOKO: *(Staring at the wall.)* I'm not going. *(ANDREA nods slowly. There is along pause.)* If Beauty wants to kill me, she knows where she can find me.

ANDREA: Really loved her, didn't you? *(DOKO doesn't say anything. The expression on her face is rigid, even though her eyes are filling with tears. ANDREA reaches over and pulls the curtain to one side.)* Thought you might want to see this. *(DOKO makes no attempt to look. ANDREA sighs.)* It's a wagon. Bought it an hour ago. The biggest one they had. Even big enough to build a puppet stage on the back. *(DOKO doesn't look. ANDREA releases the curtain.)* Sure wish you were going with us. *(Just then MARY bursts in.)*

MARY: What is taking you two so long! I thought you said you'd just be a minute—

ANDREA: She's not going.

MARY: What? That's ridiculous. They'll kill you if you stay. *(DOKO doesn't say anything.)* Oh, that'll really show them all! Come on, girl—Where's your fight? *(MARY executes two very clumsy kicks.)* Hai! Hai!

ANDREA: Mary… *(MARY stops and looks at her.)* I think Doko's done enough fighting.

MARY: Oh.

ANDREA: This time I think we're going to need some magic.

MARY: Magic? Oh! Well… let me see… I've already packed my spell book—

DOKO: Don't bother. I've made up my mind. *(MARY looks at DOKO for a moment.)*

MARY: Well, all right. *(Pulling ANDREA.)* Come on, Andrea. We better get going.

ANDREA: But—

MARY: Come on! *(She winks at ANDREA and hustles her out the door. After a moment, BETHEEN appears.)*

BETHEEN: Doko?

DOKO: What do you want?

BETHEEN: I came to apologize.

DOKO: You lied to me about my mother.

BETHEEN: I did. Your mother didn't love you. She couldn't. She was under a spell—just like Beauty, and *her* mother—

DOKO: And you.

BETHEEN: And me.

DOKO: You tried to burn my puppet.

BETHEEN: Yes, I did. And that was unforgivable. I won't be going with you in the wagon, and you will never have to see me again. I just wanted you to know that I am sorry, and that I will always be grateful to you for showing me my scars, because if you hadn't done that, I would still be living in a dream. *(She turns to leave.)*

DOKO: Wait! *(BETHEEN turns.)* How come I had spindle scars, but I wasn't under a spell like the rest of you?

BETHEEN: Maybe you were.

DOKO: What do you mean?

BETHEEN: You chose to love someone who couldn't love you back. *(DOKO doesn't say anything and BETHEEN exits. Suddenly the PUPPET stirs. She crosses to DOKO and tugs at her sleeve.)*

DOKO: What? What do you want? *(The PUPPET begins the dance from the first act.)* You want to go with Mary and Andrea, don't you? *(The PUPPET nods.)* And you can't go unless I do. *(The PUPPET nods again.)* I can't. *(The PUPPET stares at her.)* The puppet theatre was all about me and Beauty. It wouldn't be the same. All the stories—I wrote them for Beauty. They were all for her. *(The PUPPET shakes her head.)* They weren't? Which story wasn't for her? *(The PUPPET points to herself.)* Your story? What story is that? *(She points to her palms.)* The spindle story? *(She nods.)* But nobody wants to hear that. *(She disagrees.)* No, they don't. That's why they're running us out of the kingdom—so we won't be able to tell it. *(The PUPPET continues to shake her head.)* Who? Who wants to hear it? All the women with spindle scars are going to lie about it, and the women who don't have them aren't going to believe it. *(The PUPPET nods.)* But you think we should tell them anyway? We'll just get in more trouble. *(The PUPPET shrugs.)* You don't care. *(Just then MARY and ANDREA burst in. The PUPPET becomes inert.)*

MARY: Doko, I found it! The Ceremonial Helmet of Hamurabbi. *(Producing the item.)* Quick! Put it on!

DOKO: What?

MARY: Andrea, help me! *(They put in on DOKO.)* Now — how do you feel?

DOKO: Ridiculous.

MARY: You see? It worked! She's not depressed anymore.

DOKO: *(To ANDREA.)* Do you think people would want to see a play about the spindle story?

ANDREA: I think it's just about the most important story of their lives.

DOKO: *(Removing the helmet.)* But would they listen?

ANDREA: Doko—it's like with your friend, Beauty. Sometimes when you kiss a girl, they get scared and run away. But sometimes… well, sometimes they have the courage to see the truth. *(MARY slips her arm around ANDREA. ANDREA looks at her with tenderness.)* You'll never know unless you try. *(ANDREA and MARY kiss. Just then, BETHEEN appears.)*

BETHEEN: Excuse me, but, Mary, have you seen my bags? They seem to have disappeared.

MARY: *(All innocence.)* Why are you asking me?

DOKO: *(To ANDREA and MARY.)* If I were to write a play about what happened here, would you help me put it on?

ANDREA: Absolutely.

MARY: All the way.

DOKO: *(Turning to BETHEEN.)* Betheen, would you be our musician?

BETHEEN: You want me to go with you?

DOKO: Yes.

BETHEEN: But what about your puppet? How does she feel about your asking me?

DOKO: She trusts me, because I know how to listen to her now. *(She crosses slowly to BETHEEN and kisses her.)* I want you to go with us. *(BETHEEN bursts into tears. DOKO puts an arm around her.)*

MARY: Wait! I just had a vision! *(Closing her eyes.)* Your bags—your bags—are packed in our wagon!

BETHEEN: *(Smiling through her tears.)* Mary…

MARY: I didn't do it!

ANDREA: *(Grinning.)* Must have been one of those harpies from hell. *(BETHEEN embraces ANDREA and DOKO. MARY picks up DOKO's pack.)*

MARY: Well, come on… ! "The longest part of the journey is the passing of the gate!" *(She exits, followed by BETHEEN and DOKO, who manipulates the PUPPET to walk in front of her. ANDREA stays behind.)*

ANDREA: *(Puzzling.)* "The longest part of the journey is the passing of the gate...?" "The gate?" What gate? We don't have a gate… *(Chasing after MARY.)* Mary! M-a-a-ry! *(She exits.)*

Blackout

End of Play

The Princess of Pain

Illustrations by Sudie Rakusin

Once upon a time there was a princess, and this princess was in pain. She had not always been in pain, but that time seemed so long ago now, it was almost as if it were a dream.

Her pain was very great, and when people would ask her about it, she would tell them that it felt like hot coals inside her arms and her legs, that it never went away, that it was always there—sometimes worse, sometimes not as bad—but always, always there.

The pain was so great, it hurt her to walk. It hurt her to move. She spent a great deal of time in her bed, and people had to do most of the things she used to do by herself. When she did move, she used a motorized wheelchair. The princess tried everything in order to get rid of the pain. She tried different foods, and she took different pills, and she called on different doctors—and they poked and they patted and they prodded, and then they drugged and they cut and they injected, but nothing did any good, and sometimes the things they did made her feel even worse.

And sometimes people didn't believe she was in pain, because they weren't in pain. And sometimes people got annoyed with her, because she wasn't getting better, and they wanted her to. And sometimes people said things so stupid, the princess couldn't believe they weren't embarrassed to be even thinking those things.

People would tell her that there were blessings in the pain. They would tell her there were lessons in her pain. They would tell her that she was creating it herself, because it was something she needed to experience. They would tell her that if she would think nice thoughts it would go away. And sometimes, even though they wouldn't say it, they secretly believed she must have done something very, very bad in another lifetime—or maybe even this one! And so gradually, the princess began to pull away from the friends she had, or they pulled away from her. And her new friends didn't stay very long. Pretty soon she was left all alone in her big bed with her books and her poetry and her drawings and her music—and, of course, her pain.

She was so unhappy, she decided to go hunt up the goddesses and ask them why this had happened to her and what they expected her to do about it.

So she packed a few apples and a tuna fish sandwich in a bag that she hung over the back of her chair, along with a big water bottle, and she set off in her wheelchair to find the goddesses.

She had been riding for almost a quarter of an hour when she came to a grove of trees. There was a great cloud of steam rising from the grove, and the princess could hear the sound of a woman laughing. She turned down a little paved path, and there was her first goddess:

It was Aphrodite, the Greek goddess herself, naked as the day she rode in on the sea foam, frolicking in a pool of naturally heated mineral water! She was lying back, kicking her feet and throwing handfuls of water into the air to watch the sun catch the sparkling drops before they fell back on her laughing face.

“Aphrodite!” the princess called. She had to call her name several times, because the goddess was so absorbed in her pleasure. “Aphrodite! Aphrodite!”

Startled, the goddess turned in the direction of the princess.

“Why am I in so much pain?”

Aphrodite looked at her and asked her how long it had been since she had laughed. The princess said it had been a while since she had had anything to laugh about. And then Aphrodite invited her to come down into the pool. The princess got out of her wheelchair and slowly and painfully limped down to the water. She took off her clothes and slid into the warm waters. This was a difficult operation, and it took her a few minutes before she could say anything. Aphrodite watched her with interest.

“I can teach you about pleasure, but I don’t know anything about pain,” said Aphrodite.

“Then teach me about pleasure,” said the princess, and Aphrodite did.

She showed the princess how to touch herself and how to touch another woman, and there was nothing about pleasure she didn’t teach her, and the princess experienced many delights that afternoon with Aphrodite, but the pain was always the same, even when Aphrodite kissed her—and it’s no small thing to be kissed by the Goddess of Love.

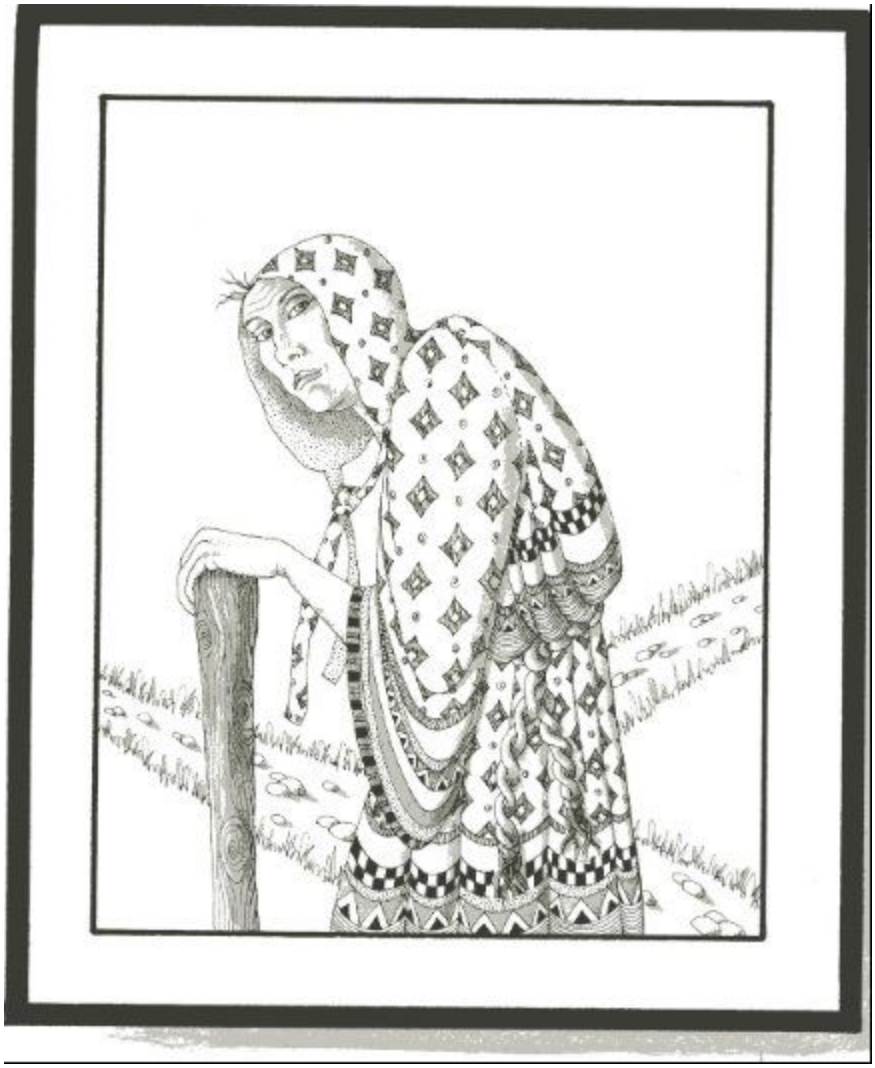
And so the princess got out of the pool and put her clothes back on, and turned sadly away. Aphrodite went back to pleasuring herself, because the princess had left, and the Goddess of Love, as we know, has a notoriously short attention span.

The princess wheeled back onto the main road and, in another quarter-mile or so, she arrived at a place where three roads came together. She didn't know where any of the roads went, but there was an old woman digging post-holes near the crossroads, and so the princess asked her which way she should go.

The old woman looked up, wiping the sweat from her eyes. "That depends on where you want to end up," she said.

"Anywhere I can get rid of my pain," said the princess.

"Ah, then it isn't going to matter which road you take."



The old woman turned back to her post-holes.

“Why not?” asked the princess. The old woman ignored her. “I said ‘why not?’” persisted the princess. Again the old woman ignored her. “Are you saying I’m not going to get rid of my pain?”

When the old woman ignored her for the third time, the princess decided she must be a Buddhist, because Buddhists had a habit of saying things like that to her, and then acting like she didn’t understand, when, in fact, the princess knew they were the ones who didn’t understand. There wasn’t much the princess hadn’t heard, because of her pain.

And so she stopped trying to get the old woman’s attention, and she picked the road that looked like it would be the easiest, because it went downhill, and off she went.

And downhill it was. The princess found herself going down and down and down and down, and when she thought the road couldn’t possibly go down any farther, it would go down some more. And as it went down, it became darker and darker and warmer and warmer, and the princess began to realize that she was not outdoors anymore, but that she was down under the earth. And just when she had decided that maybe it was time to turn back, the road went around a bend and she saw a pool of lava glowing orange-red right in front of her!

She put on her safety brakes so suddenly, she was almost thrown out of the chair. Just then the pool of molten rocks became very agitated, sputtering and splattering, and suddenly a great fiery goddess rose up from the center of it. It was the Hawai’ian goddess Pele. The princess had somehow gotten herself into the heart of Kilauea Crater.

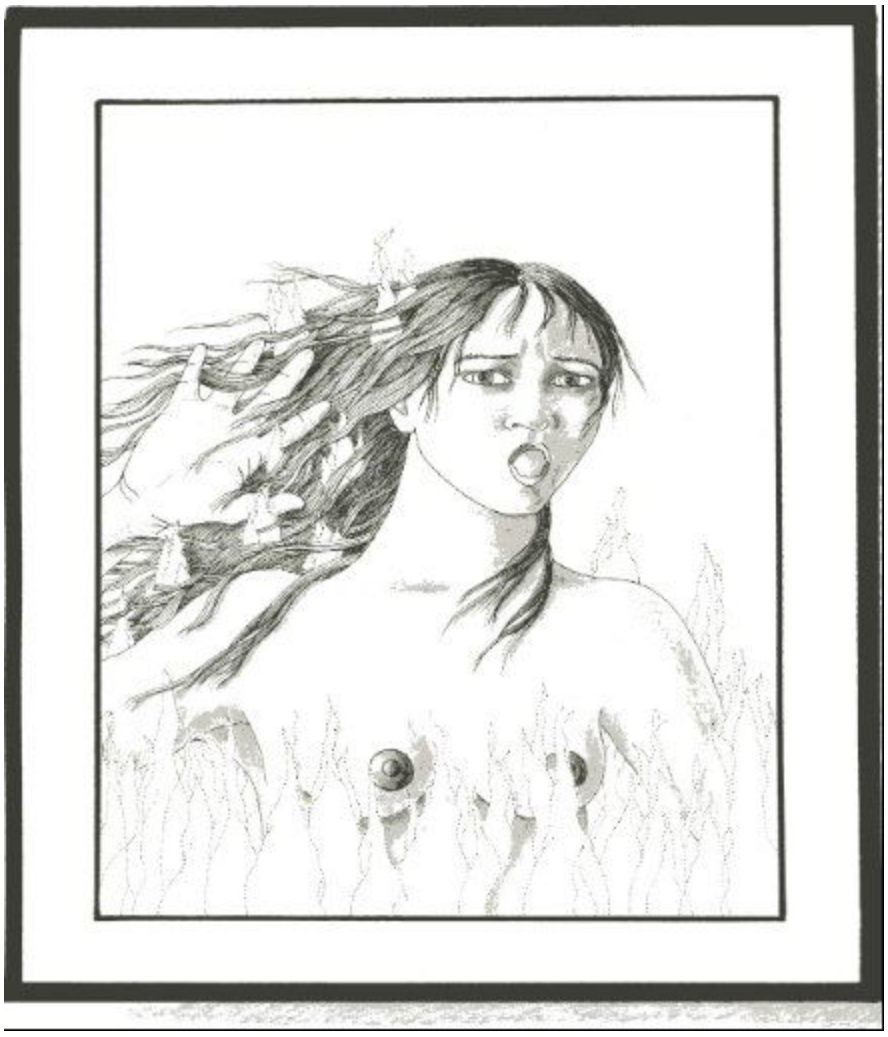
“Pain? Who speaks of pain to Pele?” The princess was too astonished to answer, and, frankly, she was a little concerned about the bits of lava that were landing within a few feet of her chair.

The lava streamed from Pele, revealing her long dark hair, but her eyes continued to glow like hot coals. “You come to speak to Pele of pain? What

can you know of pain in a year, in two years?”

“It’s been six years!” said the princess, her own fire beginning to rise.

“Silence! I speak of the pain of hundreds, thousands, millions in pain, in slavery, hundreds of years. I speak of the rape of women, of their babies born dead from nuclear radiation, born into enslavement by the white men who have ravaged my land, my beautiful, beautiful land—these worms, these monsters, these white, crawling parasites! Pain? The loss of beauty, the loss of freedom, the loss of innocence—”



“But I have lost these things,” said the princess.

“Silence—”

“Oh, ‘silence,’ yourself! I know what pain is! Maybe not your pain, but mine is enough, and if you really understood pain, you would understand that.”

And Pele looked at her with those great glowing eyes, and she approved of what she saw.

“You must burn if you are to live with pain.”

“But I don’t want to burn, and I don’t want to yell at you, and all I want is for this terrible pain to stop!”

But Pele was already descending back into her pool of lava. In the cave of the crater, the princess could hear the echo of her last words, “You must burn… You must burn… You must burn… ”

The princess was very angry, and she was frightened at being so angry. It’s one thing for the Goddess of Fire to burn with rage, but the princess was only human, and a human can only stand to burn so much.

And so she released the brakes and turned her back on the crater of Kilauea and began the long journey back to the surface of the earth. And although it was the same road, it was a harder road, because this time she was traveling uphill. It was just as much uphill as it had been downhill, but somehow, to the princess, it seemed many, many times steeper and longer than when she had been traveling downhill. And the princess found it was necessary to stop and rest, even though the chair was doing most of the work, because it was painful and tiring for her to be in motion at all.

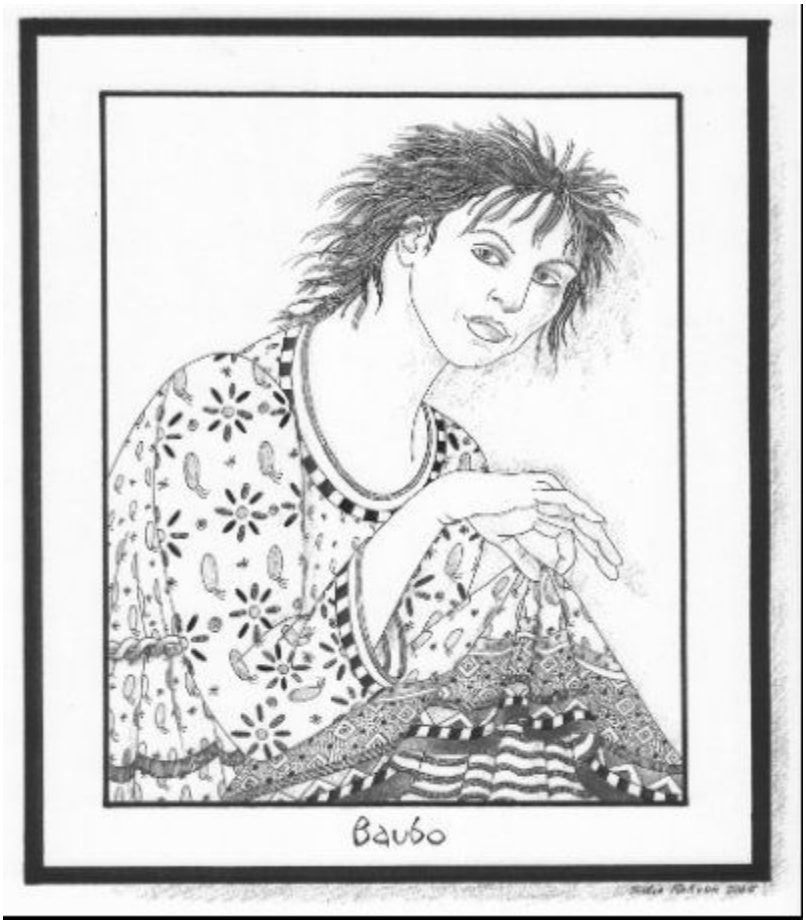
And as soon as the princess stopped to rest, she started to cry. All of that anger and all of that effort, and all it was going to do was put her right back where she started from! And while she was crying, she didn’t notice that a woman in a long dress had crept up beside her.

And suddenly, when the princess looked up, there was a woman standing right in front of her and asking if she would like to see the face of the bearded man.

“What?” asked the princess, wiping her nose.

“The face of the bearded man. Would you like to see it?”

“I don’t know. What is it?” asked the princess.


Baubo

“It’s this,” said the woman, and before the princess knew what was happening the woman had reached down to the hem of her dress, grabbed it, and lifted the whole thing up over her head. Underneath the dress, the woman was buck-naked!

And, sure enough, there were her two nipples like large, brown eyes, and below them, the biggest, silliest clown smile painted across her belly—and it was true: Her naked body really did look like the face of a bearded man. The princess didn’t know what to make of it. The whole situation was so ridiculous—one woman sitting there in her chair weeping and the other woman standing in front of her with her dress up over her head and her body looking like a clown face—that the princess began to laugh.

At the sound of the princess’ laughter, the woman, who turned out to be another one of the Greek goddesses, put her dress down and introduced herself.

“I’m Baubo. I use that trick a lot, and it always makes women laugh. Can I have one of your apples?”

Baubo sat down on the ground and began to eat. “The other goddesses don’t think much of me and my bearded-man’s face, but who do you think it was that got the Earth Goddess Demeter out of her depression and back on her feet again after her daughter was kidnapped? Yours truly.

That’s right. Demeter was even more depressed than you. She wasn’t even crying. She was just sitting. Just sitting and not caring about anything, and she was letting the whole planet go to seed, because she didn’t care about anything except her daughter who was missing.

So I went up to her and I asked her, just like I asked you, if she’d like to see the man with the beard… only she didn’t answer. She just sat there and kept staring. So I showed her the man, just like I showed you, only she didn’t laugh. So I just kept standing there. So there we were, me and Demeter… her just sitting and staring, and me just standing there like an idiot with my dress up over my head. But you know something, after a while, she

laughed. I mean, it wasn't a big laugh… more like just a little snort-laugh. But it was a laugh just the same, and that's what got her going again. Yep. Got her going clear all the way down to Hades, where her daughter was. Brought her back, too. Want a bite?"

Baubo offered the apple to the princess. The princess held up her hand.

"Oh, go on. Take a bite. It's your apple."

The princess took a bite. Satisfied, Baubo continued her narrative. "Well, so now, when the goddesses say, 'Here comes Baubo with that stupid trick of hers,' I just remind them that if it hadn't of been for me, there wouldn't be any trees, or flowers, or grass, or bushes."

"But I haven't lost my daughter," said the princess. "I'm in pain—terrible pain, all the time."

"What about when you were laughing at me?" asked Baubo.

"Even then."

Baubo looked puzzled. "Are you sure?"

"Very sure. It never goes away. Even when I sleep."

And then Baubo looked very sad. "Then, I don't think I can help you."

The goddess looked so sad, the princess almost wanted to pretend she felt better, but she didn't, and so she thanked Baubo for trying, and she rolled back onto the road that went uphill, back to the crossroads where the old woman had told her it wouldn't matter which road she took.

"And maybe it won't," thought the princess, "but I'm in pain whether I go or stay, so I may as well go."

The old woman was still digging her post-holes and still ignoring the princess, so the princess rolled right past her without saying a word. This

time, she picked a road that went neither up nor down, but out onto a wide, flat plain.

In the distance, she could see tiny figures, but they were so far away she couldn't make out what they were doing. As she got closer, she realized that they were women with swords and shields, and that they were practicing fighting with each other. Their leader was a very, very strong woman, not too tall, but with muscles you could see even when she wasn't using them.

She was busy coaching the women in their fighting skills, but she turned when one of the women cried out, "Look! A chariot without a horse! She rides a chariot without a horse!"

The warrior women left off fighting and gathered around the wheelchair with great curiosity. The princess took pride in showing them all how it worked, how she could make it go faster or slower, how she could make it back up, or turn to one side, or spin around in very small circles. She showed them the batteries (she carried a spare), the joystick, the electric horn, and the safety brakes. The women, used to the wooden wheels of chariots, marveled at the rubber tires. And they showed their approval for how the princess had fitted the back of the chair with a bag for her food and a bottle for her water.

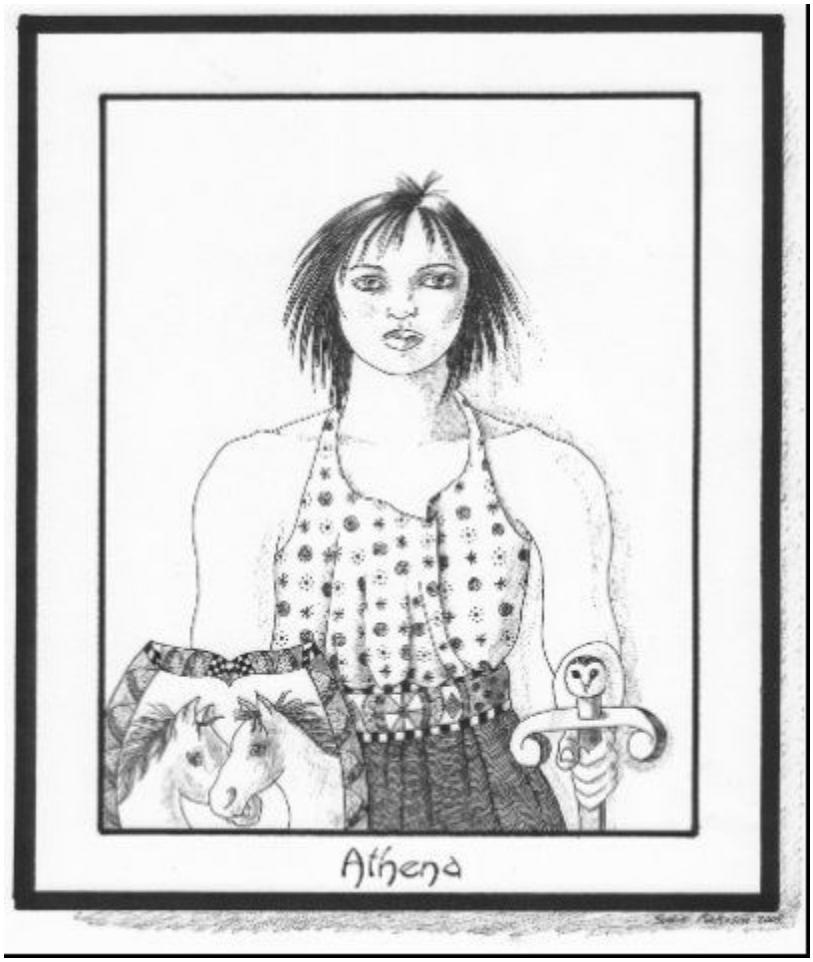
The princess was just getting ready to show them how fast she could travel, when the leader suddenly clanged her sword against her shield. The women moved quickly away from the chariot-with-no-horse and formed themselves into a straight line. They stood very still, shoulder to shoulder, looking neither to the left, nor to the right.

The leader passed back and forth along the line, inspecting the women. Suddenly, she reached out with her sword and tapped one of the women on the top of her shoulder. The woman stepped out of the line, drew her sword, and began to spar with her teacher. Both the student and the teacher were very skilled, but the teacher was the quicker of the two, and it wasn't long before she had her student's sword on the ground.

The warrior women went back to the line, where the women were still in perfect formation. The leader tapped another student, and this woman stepped forward to spar. One by one, the teacher tested them. Finally, after the fourth woman had been defeated, the princess wheeled herself forward.

“Excuse me, but I would like to fight you.”

Athena—for, of course, the goddess was Athena—looked at her very hard.


Athena

The princess did not have muscles like the other fighters. In fact, she did not have muscles even like non-athletic, but able-bodied women. Because of her pain, the princess had not been able to use her muscles for many years, and so they were not very big at all.

The great warrior goddess narrowed her eyes at the princess. “But you have never trained with me.”

“I have never trained with you, it’s true, but I have trained, and I would like to fight you.”

Athena looked at the princess’ arms. The princess lifted her chin ever so slightly.

“Can you use a sword?” asked the Goddess of War.

“I can use my wits and they’re sharper than any sword, even yours.”

And no sooner were those words out of her mouth, than Athena lunged for the princess’ neck, but the princess was even quicker. She pushed the joystick forward, ramming the metals plates of the footrests into Athena’s shins, and, at the same time, she ducked under Athena’s arms and retrieved the canister of pepper spray that hung below the seat of the chair. Holding the spray in front of her with both hands, she aimed the canister directly toward her attacker’s face and shouted “Back off!”

Athena cut swiftly to one side attempting to reach around behind the princess, but the princess twisted in her chair, and, this time, she released the pepper spray. Athena covered her face, but it was too late. Already the goddess was bent over with coughing. The princess took the whistle that hung on a chain around her neck, and blew as hard as she could. “Get help!” she cried. “Fire!” The warrior women stood in stunned silence for a moment, and then they began to cheer. The princess was still shouting, when Athena came and laid her sword at the princess’ feet.

“You fight well,” she said.

“I have to,” the princess replied simply. “I live in pain all the time. I want you to teach me how to defeat my enemy.”

Athena studied the princess’ face. “You speak of your own body as an enemy?”

“I do. It is,” said the princess.

“If you defeat your body, you will have killed yourself.” Athena looked grim. “A warrior never, never takes her own life.”

The princess looked at her solemnly. “Sometimes they do.”

Athena and the princess looked hard at each other in silence for a moment, and finally, Athena looked away. “It’s true, but it’s extreme.”

“My pain is extreme.”

Athena shook her head. “Only you can know what you can bear. I cannot help you, Brave One. You are perhaps the greatest warrior of them all.”

And Athena knelt before the princess for the second time, and touched her forehead to the princess’ feet. But the princess felt no joy in having defeated the Goddess of War. She had hoped that this would be the goddess to teach her how to kill her pain.

Fighting back her tears, the princess wheeled herself slowly back onto the road. Behind her, she could hear the sound of sword on shield as the women resumed their exercises.

When she got to the crossroads this time, she was alone. The princess decided it would be a good idea to eat her lunch before she set out on the last road. She wasn’t hungry, but that was not unusual for her. The pain made it difficult to feel hungry. She unwrapped the tuna fish sandwich, and began eating it very slowly.

Suddenly, she felt something brush against her leg. Looking down, she saw a large black cat.

“Oh, please go away,” she said. “I’m allergic to cats.” Already, she could begin to feel her throat closing up. “Go away! Shoo!”

But the cat was persistent, and as the princess had always been fond of cats before the disability, she reached down to pet the animal. Suddenly, to her amazement, the cat began to grow taller and taller. What was even more amazing, the body seemed to absorb all of the fur and become the body of a woman, but the head, which grew as large as a human head, remained that of a black cat.

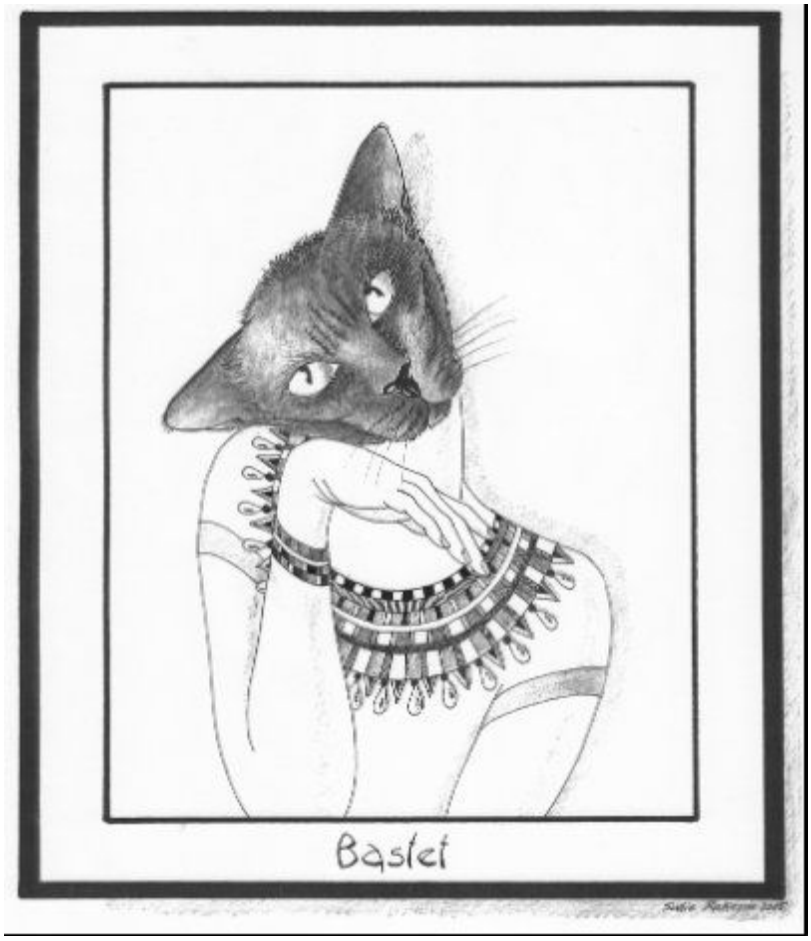
It was Bastet, the Egyptian Goddess of the Home. The princess had never seen anything so odd-looking in her life, and she didn’t know what to say. Fortunately, Bastet did.

“May I have your sandwich, if you’re not going to eat it?”

The princess was too surprised to respond for a moment, but the cat-woman persisted: “May I?” The princess picked up what was left of the sandwich and held it out to Bastet.

“Do you want any more of it?” the cat goddess asked.

“You can have it.” The princess really wasn’t hungry at all.


Bastet

Bastet took the sandwich in her woman-hands, and then bent her head down and began to eat the sandwich, cat-fashion, sniffing it and bumping it with her nose, and then taking the bread in her mouth and shaking it, so that the bits of tuna fish went flying. The princess, unsure of the protocol for such an encounter, reached up as discretely as she could to dislodge the chunks of tuna that had landed in her hair.

“Good,” purred Bastet. “Make it yourself?”

“Yes,” said the princess.

“You must be a good cook.”

“Oh, I used to be, before I got sick. Now it’s too painful for me to use my arms.”

Bastet continued shaking and flinging the slices of bread while the princess spoke. “I had a cat, too. Her name was Willow, but now she has to stay outdoors, because I’m allergic to her.”

Bastet paused between bites and made a sympathetic sound.

“It’s hard to be at home in my home anymore. I have so many allergies and I can’t do any of the things I used to.” She sighed. “I don’t suppose you can do anything about that.”

Bastet had finished the tuna fish sandwich by now, and she was performing a very unusual operation, stroking her whiskers with her woman-hands and then licking them clean as if they were paws.

“Would you care for a napkin?”

Bastet was too busy licking to have heard the princess’ offer, and the princess decided it was best not to repeat it. Finally Bastet was through with her grooming. She turned her yellow eyes toward the princess and said:

“A home is where you are used to things.”

“But I never get used to the pain.”

Bastet crouched down next to the princess and butted her large head against the princess’ shoulder. She did it very gently, so as not to hurt her, and that way the princess knew she was comforting her, the way that cats have always comforted humans these many thousands of years. A simple enough gesture, but it was kinder and more direct than most of the things humans would come up with in situations like this.

And after that, Bastet began to shrink again, until she was just a large, black, Egyptian cat. The princess sighed that here was another goddess unable to help her, and she slowly wheeled away from the crossroads, leaving the Goddess of the Home picking and pawing through bits of tuna that somehow had gotten scattered on the ground.

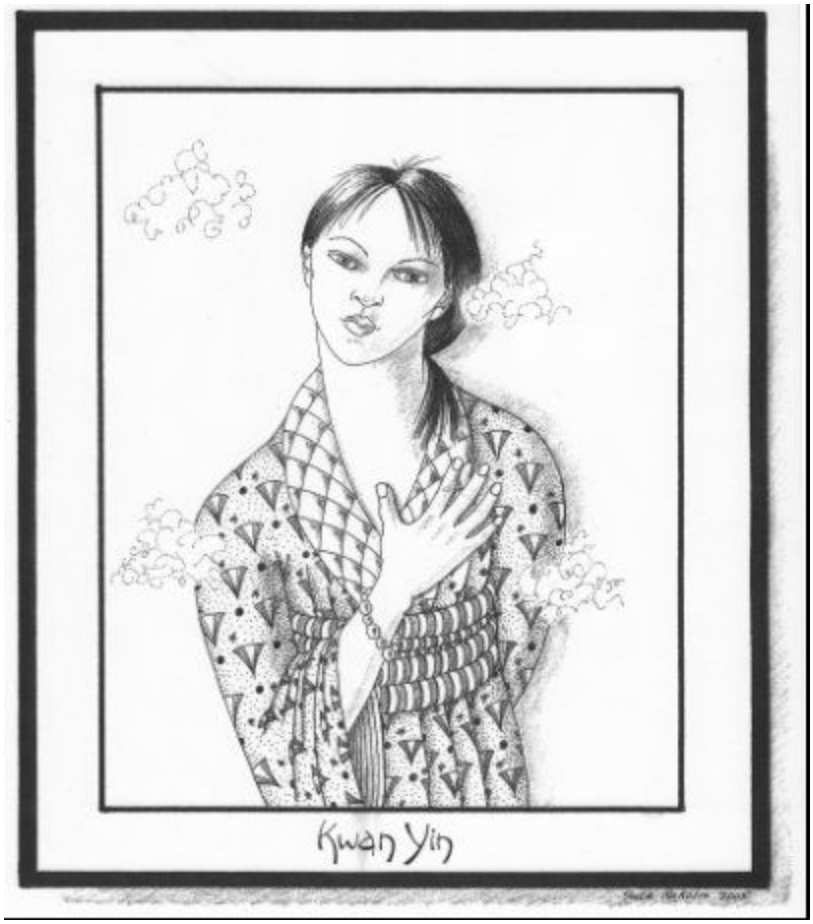
The third road led to the ocean, and after a while, the princess could smell the salt spray in her nose. It had been so long, so very long since she had been to the ocean… another lifetime. And she had so loved the ocean, so loved running along the sand! Wheelchairs don’t travel on the sand, she thought sadly. Wheelchairs don’t travel anywhere beautiful or private, she thought.

The road led her up to the dunes, and there she was able to sit and look out over the ocean. She was able to hear the rhythmic roar of the waves on the beach. It was very soothing to be there. So soothing, in fact, that the princess began to fall asleep. She couldn’t tell if she was dreaming or not when a great Asian goddess arose out of the surf and came toward her on the dunes.

This was Kwan Yin, the Chinese Goddess of Compassion.

As the princess lay slumped in her chair, her head nodding gently on her chest, Kwan Yin wrapped her soft robes about her and began to whisper words of comfort in her ear. The princess couldn’t tell if it was the sound of the waves, or the sound of Kwan Yin breathing. She couldn’t tell if it was

the breeze blowing in from the ocean, or Kwan Yin’s long fingers stroking the hair back from her forehead.


Kwan Yin

“Kwan Yin… Kwan Yin… ” Was it the goddess singing to her, or was she calling the goddess? “Kwan Yin… Kwan Yin… ” The princess was going deeper and deeper into a trance. She could still feel the pain, but it was as if it were in another place, as if the pain were a huge roaring bonfire that she was walking away from… walking away from.

“Kwan Yin… Kwan Yin… Kwan Yin… ”

The great red sun began to slip down behind the horizon, and the breeze began to grow colder and colder, and suddenly the princess awoke with a start. Had she been dreaming? Where had she been? Had Kwan Yin really been with her?

The pain was acute in her arms and legs, because she was cold.

“Oh, how will I be able to get back?” The princess began to panic. She felt so helpless sometimes in her wheelchair. It seemed so unfair that any time she indulged herself at all, there was always such a high price to pay.

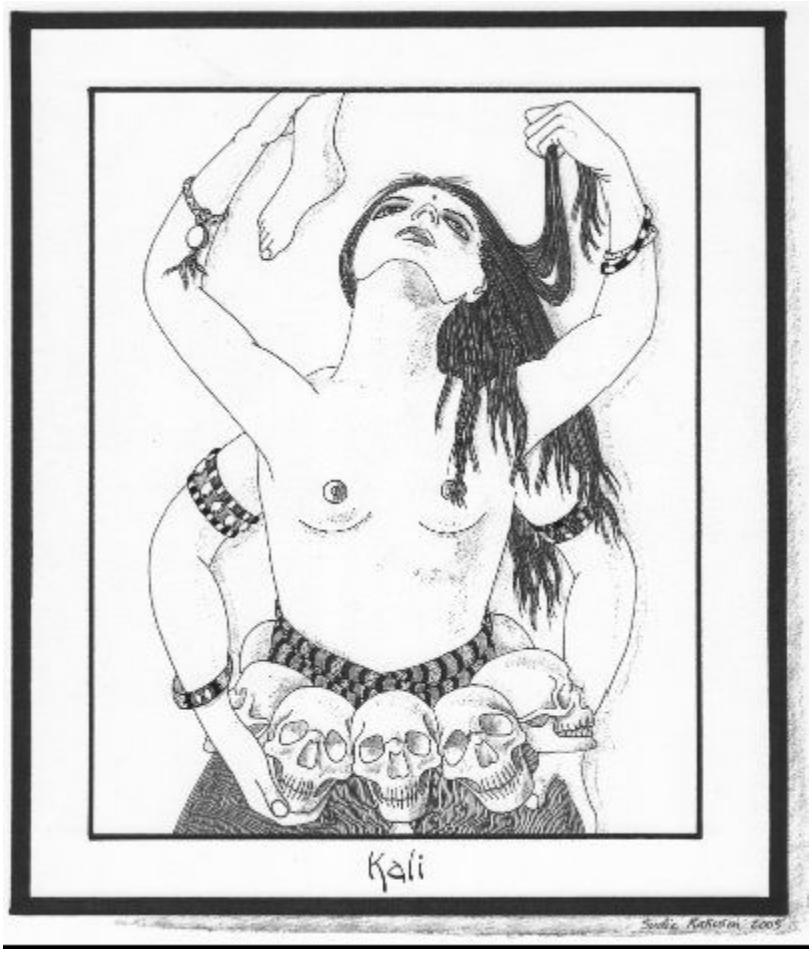
The wind continued to rise, and the sky grew darker and darker. The princess pushed her chair to go faster and faster, and the faster it went, the more it bumped over the road and hurt her body, but she was determined to get back to where she had started as quickly as she could. Pretty soon it was very dark, and she could hardly see the road, but this only increased her sense of urgency. And before she had time to think, the wheelchair had run off the edge of the road and was stuck fast in the sand.

“Oh!” she cried out in her fear and frustration. And she got out of the chair, which was painful and difficult for her, and she began to tug at the heavy chair with two batteries. This was very painful on her arms, and she found she was unable to budge the chair. She kicked the wheels, and hit the arms of it, and now her hands hurt.

She sat in the lopsided chair with the cold wind blowing on her neck, and, tucking her hands under her armpits, she began to howl.

Suddenly a goddess appeared out of the dark. It was a goddess with four arms and a belt of human skulls. She also had a string of human arms and legs hanging around her waist, and she was eating her own intestines. It was Kali, the Destroyer Goddess of India.

The princess, too helpless and unhappy to be afraid, kept howling, and Kali, her mouth dripping with blood from her intestines, howled back at her and danced so that the dead arms and legs flapped around her hips. And the princess screamed, “You can take my arms and legs, too, for your belt. I hate them! I hate them!” And she began to pull at her legs, trying to tear them off, but, of course, they stayed firmly attached to the rest of her body.


Kali

And Kali laughed at the princess, and rattled her skulls, which only made the princess howl more. She began to curse the Goddess of Destruction. She cursed her with every word she knew, at the top of her lungs. She cursed her, and then she cursed her own body. She cursed her arms and legs that burned all the time like hot coals. She cursed her wheelchair, kicking at it while she did. She cursed her circulation, her nervous system, her muscles. She cursed the doctors who couldn't help her, she cursed the people who said such stupid, stupid things to her, she cursed the goddesses who didn't answer her questions, and then she began to curse her own stupidity in thinking there would be any answers, any cure, any help, any hope. She cursed herself for not knowing it was her fate to be tortured more than other people, to live in the kind of pain all day and all night that most people would find unbearable for five minutes. She laughed a wild laugh at her impossible stupidity for believing she had any right to anything, to any love, to any comfort, to any peace, to any safety, to any rest. And Kali laughed and taunted and shook her bones at her while she cursed.

And then she cried. She cried because it was freezing cold, but she knew it was not cold enough to kill her, and that all that would happen would be what had always happened: She would suffer, and her suffering would just be more and more and never less, and this would go on as long as she was willing not to kill herself. And she knew that, in spite of it all, she wasn't ready to die, and so she would just go on suffering, and great tears rolled down her cheeks.

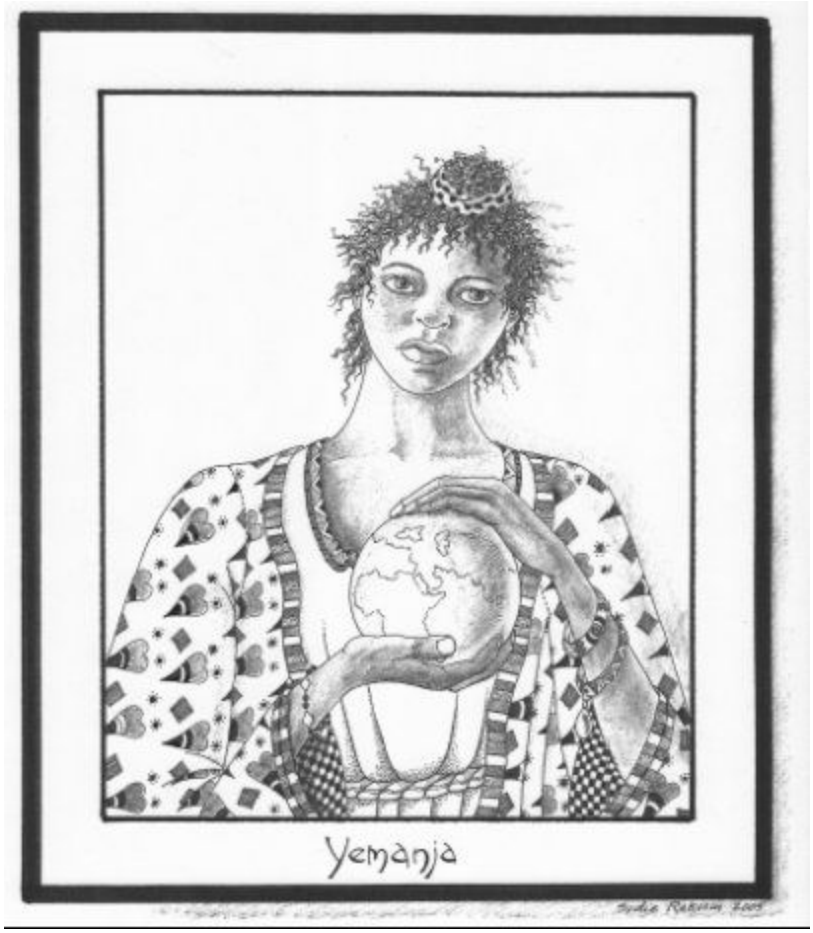
And gradually the sound of Kali's bones faded into the night, and the wind died down, and a soft murmur arose between the sounds of the waves. It was a woman's voice, a soft, rich voice, like a humming song from way deep in the throat.

And the princess looked up to see the great African goddess, Yemanja. Suddenly, the princess was no longer in her wheelchair. She was no longer on the dunes. She was in the bosom of the Mother of the Earth, and the Mother of the Earth was teaching her.

The princess heard Yemanja tell her about birthing, about how the great waters of the ocean flowed from Yemanja's amniotic sack when she was

giving birth to the world. Yemanja talked about her labor, her agony, and she talked about the enslavement and torture of her people and the suffering they knew they would not escape in a lifetime, and that their children would not escape in *their* lifetime, nor their children's children.

She talked about hatred, and how some of her people would turn their anger on their own children and on themselves. She told the princess that there was no justice in the world, no compensation for the suffering, no cures for the inequality in the world. She told of her sorrow and her rage at how it had all turned out, for the world was bigger than the goddesses, and she told her that she, the princess, would have to answer her own questions, find her own meaning—that her life was a terrible ordeal, and that there was no purpose to her suffering, no reason for her being the one to suffer.


Yemanja

And the princess had known these things all along, and so it was good, even though it was hard, to hear them. Yemanja understood, and that was a relief to the princess.

And in the arms of Yemanja, she found she could see with the eyes of Yemanja. And as the great sun rose again over the earth, the princess saw the pain and the horror of poisoned air and water, the boneyards of the massacres of millions upon millions of people by the men of every race and color and nationality. She saw the diseases, the poverty, the starvation, the misery—the utter misery of the creatures on the planet, and she could not accept it, but it still just was.

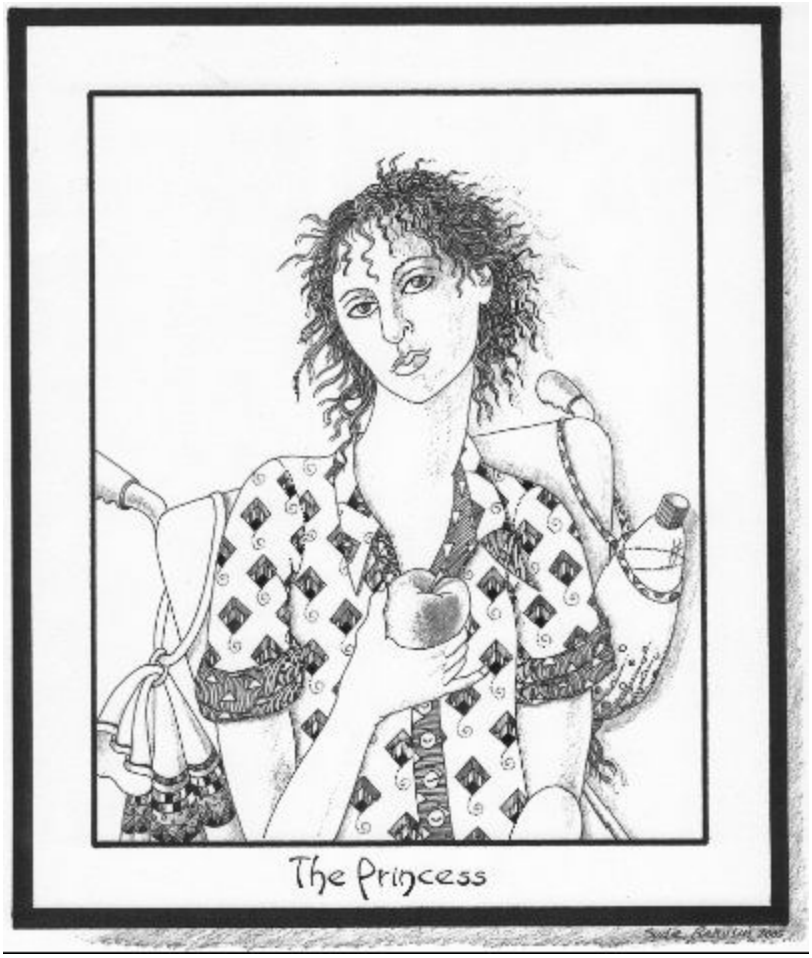
And when the sun had risen, she looked down and saw the dunes below her, and there was her wheelchair, still lying tilted in the sand. Yemanja set the princess gently down beside it, and then she turned and disappeared into the ocean.

The princess sighed. She knew that she would have to get the chair out of the sand, and that, in order to do this, she would have to take everything off of it so as to make it as light as possible, and she knew she would have to take the heavy batteries off, and then lift them back on again. And she knew she would have to dig and dig in the sand, and that it might take her all day to get the chair back on the road, and that all of this would be very painful and take a very long time.

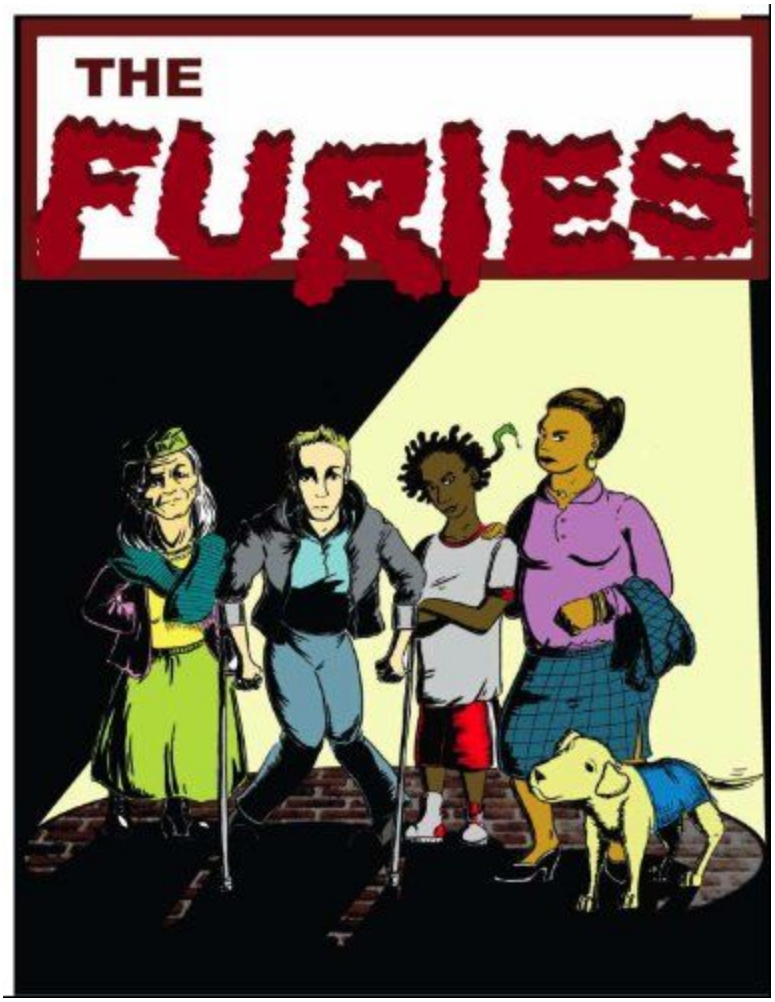
The princess sighed. She took out her water bottle and her last remaining apple. She thought of Baubo, and she thought of Bastet, and she thought of Aphrodite kissing her, and of Athena saluting her, and she remembered the kindness of Kwan Yin, and the fury of Pele, and the tauntings of Kali, and the wisdom of Yemanja, and then she remembered the woman at the crossroads and wondered if she would see her again on her way back home.

She sighed and bit into the apple, thinking to herself, “And I must be the Goddess of Pain.”

And so she was.


The Princess

The Furies



It looked like an unlikely gathering to decide the fate of the world—four women, dykes at that, gathered around the kitchen table of a small apartment in a suburb of Boston. In fact, it was really only three women. The fourth was still a girl.

There were no maps on the table, no flip charts, no laptops—nothing to indicate the seriousness of the issues, except for the furrowed brows and the stiff postures. It might have been a gathering of housemates to discuss a re-assignment of cleaning chores. It might have been a meeting of local activists to determine strategies for saving the last remaining women's bookstore in the state.

But it was not. It was a meeting of the Furies. Or, rather, the Third Wave of Furies.

The First Wave had been Greek mythological harpies with heads wreathed in serpents, eyes dripping blood, wings like bats, and the bodies of dogs. Female personifications of vengeance, they were said to have driven their enemies mad.

The Second Wave Furies were a collective of lesbian feminists in Washington, DC, who organized themselves in the early 1970's. Although these Furies lasted less than two years, their fierce politic lived up to the reputation of their namesakes.
The Third Wave marked an evolution and synthesis of the other Waves. The four lesbians sitting around the kitchen table were all *bona fide* super-heroines, complete with superpowers and a charge to employ them responsibly. Hence the heated argument.

"It's a closet. Let's call it what it is. It's a fucking closet!" Medusa exploded, glaring across the table at Crone, a Jewish woman old enough to be her grandmother. Well-aware of the fact she was the youngest, Medusa was feeling defensive. In fact, at fourteen, she was half the age of Andrea, the next youngest Fury. She was also the most recent member of the foursome. The others had been working together for five years. She had been with them exactly three days and twelve hours.

“It’s *undercover* work.” Crone was choosing her words carefully. It would not be the best use of her resources to engage this young hothead in a showdown. Using a technique she had picked up from forty years of women’s studies faculty meetings, she pushed her chair slightly back from the table. It signaled disengagement—a position of self-assurance that also tended to lower the aggression, a win-win for her. She could even afford to smile: “If the Furies went public with our superpowers, we could not be as effective.”

“Right. The fucking closet.” Medusa was exquisitely sensitive to being patronized. If this white bitch wanted to pull that sit-back-in-the-chair bullshit, two could play that game. Medusa gave her own chair a shove and then sat back in it, crossing her arms over her skinny, butch chest. There was just the slightest motion among her dreads.

“No… ” Andrea was speaking. Medusa didn’t move, but inwardly she felt her stomach turn upside down. Andrea was her idol, and she—Medusa—the one who thought girls with crushes were dopey, was completely infatuated with this powerful woman whose words were like arrows that always, always, always hit the mark. How did she do that? Andrea had a doctorate in psychology, but there were plenty of folks running around with “Doctor” in front of their names who still didn’t know shit. Medusa should know. She had been the object of their attention throughout her short, but interminable, “at-risk” youth. Andrea was addressing her now. Medusa kept her eyes resolutely focused on her coffee cup. “The closet is about shame. Nobody here is ashamed of her superpowers… but it *is* true that we hide our identity.”

“Oh, okay. So it’s not a closet, except when it is.” Medusa was muttering to the inside of her coffee cup. She knew her tough-girl talk wasn’t fooling Andrea at all, but she didn’t know any other way to respond. She had taken a position, a fighting stance, in this argument, and that felt familiar and comfortable to her—even if it had just been punctured by one of Andrea’s arrows.

It was funny how most of the world would have denied the validity of Andrea's superpower… how the world would say that living as a butch dyke with cerebral palsy and getting a PhD were admirable feats that showed initiative and took hard work and perseverance, but that didn't really demonstrate any superpower. And maybe they were right. It wasn't really the surviving, or even the thriving. It was Andrea's astounding ability to analyze oppression—any and all oppressions—with the intricacy of their interplay. It was her ability to detect the truth of a person trapped in the interstices.

Talking to Andrea was like watching someone play a game of psychic pick-up sticks. She would study the layout for a long time, before she would make her move. Then, with amazing precision and dexterity, she would locate some dissociated fragment of the self, slowly and gently extricating it without disturbing the fragile matrix of other fragments that surrounded it. And in this way, one pick-up stick at a time, she disassembled and reassembled her clients. She did not have to patronize or extort gratitude. She did it for love of the game.

And her mistakes! Goddess, the woman's mistakes were sheer genius. Watching Andrea make mistakes and follow up on them had been a revelation to Medusa. For the first time in her life, she realized that she might be capable of connecting with another person, might even be human herself. Nothing less than a superpower could have done that. But, of course, she would never let Andrea know. And, of course, Andrea would know anyway.

Gaia was becoming restless. She stood up to collect the dishes from breakfast. "Yeah, Medusa, we are having such a good time here in white Amerika, being lesbians and all, why don't we just let them all know we're out to get them? Yeah, bring it on!"

"That's right!" Medusa was on her feet, following her. "Why should we waste our time hunting down the perpetrators, or waiting until we accidentally run into them?" Gaia had piled the dishes in the sink, and now she was starting to scrape them. Medusa turned to address Andrea and

Crone. “If we stand up as the Furies, they’ll come looking for us and save us the trouble.”

Crone shook her head with a patronizing smile. Medusa felt one of her dreads start to uncoil with a hissing sound that woke Athena, who had been sleeping under the table near Andrea’s feet.

Athena, a blond Labrador retriever, was Andrea’s service dog. She was actually one of the Furies, having been trained by Andrea to identify sadists or disability-rights obstructionists. At a signal from Andrea, Athena would approach the person and lick their hand. As a mutant dog, she produced a special saliva that could penetrate human skin, injecting a rare virus into the bloodstream of the host. This virus would produce a neurological condition in the host that resulted in rictus—a permanent, nervous smile. The nervous smile, so emblematic of vulnerability coupled with dependence, would enable the host to perpetually experience the emotional affect of the severely disabled in an indifferent, ableist world—but without a disability! Brilliant.

As Andrea laid a restraining hand on Athena, Crone addressed the angry, young Black girl. “Not all of us can turn our enemies to stone.”

“I can protect you! That’s the point… we stand together—like four musketeers!” Medusa, turning to Gaia, appealed to the other Fury of color for support, but Gaia, her back to Medusa, was shaking her head as she washed the dishes. Two more dreads uncoiled themselves, as Medusa turned on her. “What, Gaia? You think I wouldn’t have your back? You think this is all about me?”

Gaia took her time finishing with the bowl she had been washing. Gaia, the powerful Mexican American woman from San Antonio… What was the secret to her superpower? Was it her ability to tower over everyone with her six-foot-plus height? Was it the fact that she was usually the most substantial woman at any gathering, with her three-hundred-plus pounds? No question her stature had something to do with it, but that couldn’t be everything. What was the magic in the word “*pobrecito*,” or in the way that she would say it, that made everyone who heard it immediately lose all

sense of entitlement? Was it something in her tone of voice, or in her eyes? Was it a form of mesmerism?

Whatever it was, it worked. Gaia unquestionably had a superpower, because when she said "*pobrecito*," which is the Spanish word for "poor thing," people truly did lose connection with whatever memory files formed the basis for their entitlement. For some, it might be their wealth or status, but for others, it was their appearance—their youth, their able-bodiedness, their skin color. When Gaia said "*pobrecito*," the synaptic connections just ceased, as if someone had thrown the switch on some massive circuit-breaker. The arrogant were humbled. The self-assured were confused. Perhaps, someday, Gaia would be able to seize control of satellite broadcasting equipment to send her mighty, sarcastic epithet around the world.

But there was no entitlement at this kitchen table today. Attitude, yes, plenty—but it was attitude born of responsibility, not privilege.

Gaia was looking at Crone. "I think it's time we let Crone tell us what to do."

But Crone already *had* told them, a week ago.

The Furies were accustomed to relying on Crone's judgment, because that was, in fact, her superpower. She had the ability to assess a situation immediately and from all angles, and to determine in the same instant the absolute best allocation of available resources for the most effective outcome. Hardly leaping tall buildings with a single bound, or traveling faster than a speeding bullet, but a superpower nonetheless, and one a good deal more useful to idealistic individuals and organizations with social justice on their mind.

It was Gaia who had met Medusa first. The girl had turned up at the homeless shelter that Gaia ran, and it had been immediately apparent that she needed counseling. Andrea was the obvious referral. As soon as Andrea heard the story of Medusa's superpower, she had approached the other Furies about inviting her to join. And that had been when Crone said "no."

But how could they *not* take her in? Medusa was only fourteen. She was on the streets, and she was angry, with a head full of snakes and a look that could kill, literally. She had been a survivor of child-torture… the usual kind. The kind that about one-out-of-three girls and one-out-of-five boys have to endure in this country. Sexual abuse, at the hands—and penis—of a trusted family member. The sort of thing that drives a girl to promiscuity, to drinking, to drugs, to suicide. Nothing unusual about her story—except for the part where her dreads began to morph into serpents during one of the "sessions."

He had been holding her head, as he was been accustomed to doing, with his fingers twined around her dreads in order to get a better grip, when he suddenly he felt something sting his hand. He thought maybe she had bitten him, but that wasn't possible. Her mouth was occupied elsewhere. Maybe it was some kind of clip, or pin, in her hair… but then he felt it again. "Shit!" he had cried. Pulling back his hand, he saw two distinct puncture wounds. Something had bitten him, but it was something with very small, very sharp teeth. Looking back at her head, he realized that her dreads were moving. They were weaving back in forth like… snakes! Before he had time to shout again, he saw that the girl was looking up at him, her brown eyes fixing his like a snake charmer.

And then his penis began to grow cold, even though it was still in her mouth. Cold, but still erect. He moved back and saw that it was grey and mottled… like stone. Stone! His penis was turning to stone! And then his testicles… his abdomen… his thighs! The perpetrator stumbled back and fell, both legs crumbling apart at the knees. He was turning to sandstone. He reached out an arm to pull himself up, but his arms, his hands had stiffened into stone.

With horror, he sensed his jaw, his hard, scratchy jaw that, like sandpaper, had so frequently abraded her tender girl parts—his jaw was turning to stone also—and crumbling! Everything… ears, nose… everything was turning to stone, except his eyes, which were still fixed on hers. Instinctively, he knew that when he turned them away, they, too, would become stone. For a long time, maybe as long as a minute—and a minute of

torture can be an infinity, as she knew and he was learning—for that long minute, she held his gaze. And then, in the only gift he would ever give her, he acknowledged her utter victory over him, averting his eyes which had turned to sand before he even completed the gesture. Like grains from an hourglass, they were running down his stony cheek, opaque fragments taking with them any possibility of a record of the horrors they had witnessed.

A girl whose name could have been anyone's, rose from her knees for the last time, kicking the blocks of sandstone over and over, until everything was reduced to shapeless, memory-less sand. Without turning back, she mounted the stairs out of her dungeon, out of her childhood, and out of her mortality. She was now Medusa and the girlhood she never had would now never be.

This was the girl that Crone had told them not to take into the family, not to initiate as a Fury. This was the girl that Gaia and Andrea had voted in anyway. This was the girl who was already, two days and twelve hours later, making demands the Furies felt they could not meet. And now this was the girl that Gaia was asking Crone to decide about for the second time.

But Medusa was not about to give her the chance. "Shit! She already told y'all not to let me work with you! What does she know?"

Crone smiled at Medusa, "Is this morning an example of our new effectiveness?"

"Hey, fuck you!" All the dreads uncoiled in unison now, their serpent heads hissing in the direction of the older woman. Burning one's last bridge is a sobering act, and Medusa found herself reacting to her own reaction. "I mean it! You just don't want to deal with my anger, do you? You and the rest of the world!" She was avoiding Andrea's gaze, but she didn't need to. Andrea had her eyes down and was focusing on the placemat in front of her. The bridge was burning her!

"My anger is worth ten times the superpowers of the rest of y'all, and while you're out there making folks a little ashamed of themselves, *I'm* making

fucking *beaches* out of them! You hear that? *Beaches*! Under my feet!" She slammed out the door.

Crone smiled. It would have been a waste of her energy to say, "I told you so."

"Shit." Andrea put her head in her hands. She was brilliant at conflict resolution, except where it concerned the people she loved. There was a long silence. The water was running in the sink, but Gaia had stopped washing dishes. Abruptly, she shut it off.

"No." Gaia turned to the two white women. "I know what you're thinking, but you're wrong. This is *good.* We did not make a mistake, and Crone, you may have been right that asking her to join us might not be the most effective use of our resources—but did we ever really have a consensus on what our goal was?"

Wasn't it obvious? Crone rolled her eyes: "Saving the world."

Gaia turned to Andrea for support. Andrea was thinking hard. She looked up from the placemat. "This girl is post-traumatic, she's raw, and she's not going to let any of us get away with anything less than loving her—and, at the same time, she's going to make that impossible. In fact, she's going to punish us for trying."

"Sounds like an energy trap to me." Crone poured herself another cup of coffee. She'd seen more than her share of mommy-baiting in the academy.

"Are we entitled to walk away from our sister? That's the question." Gaia let it hang in the air.

"Are we mandated to achieve the impossible?" Crone countered.

Andrea had her own question: "*Is* it impossible?"

The three women sat for a moment. Finally, Crone turned to Andrea. "You said she was post-traumatic...?" Gaia started to shake her head, and Crone

added quickly, “Just gathering data.”

Andrea sighed. “Yeah. Full-tilt, complex, post-traumatic stress syndrome. And in some ways her superpowers are going to make it more difficult to heal, because she’s actually in the position to act out her revenge fantasies.”

Gaia turned to Andrea, “But it’s a syndrome. What’s the cure?”

“Time.” As if she had understood her mistress’ response, Athena groaned and dropped her head to the floor.
Crone looked away. “Time.” Were they that dense, or just trying not to be ageist? “I’m seventy-five.”

Andrea nodded. “Well, what if we did what she wanted? What if we did stand up publicly… come out about our superpowers...?”

“Have you lost your mind?” Crone interrupted. She couldn’t believe this was Andrea talking.

“But that *would* bring the enemy out of hiding. You’re seventy-five. If time is a concern, this could be very efficient.”

Crone shook her head wearily. Yes, she had the superpower to arrive at lightning-fast deductions about energy allocation, but what good was that when she still had to reason with the unreasonable? “Look, I’m a strategist. Gaia, you level the playing field. Andrea, you and Athena give folks a taste of their own medicine. But, none of us can kill—”

“Except Medusa.” The girl was still a Fury, Gaia thought.

Crone continued, “Except Medusa… but the perpetrators would be after all of us. Once we went public, we would need to be with her all the time, even when we slept—*especially* when we slept. It would be like life on a chain gang.” Crone looked at her hands, another strategic gesture. “I am concerned about time, and I don’t want my last active decade to be wasted in panic and paranoia—and the kinds of scenes like the one we’ve just had.”

Gaia sighed. “*Pobrecita*” was on the tip of her tongue, but she checked the impulse. “That girl needs us, and I’m not walking away from her. Even if it means leaving the two of you.”

Another silence descended on the table.

Finally Andrea spoke, “What about a compromise? We could ask her to work with us, our way, until she had more recovery—”

Crone exploded, “Our way? No! ‘Our way’ is subtle. ‘Our way’ can’t be traced. But she’s got this head full of snakes and turns men into sandpiles. She can’t work ‘our way’ even if she wanted to. We let her join us and we might as well go on Oprah.”

Gaia sighed. “Crone’s right. She’s too visible.”

“Well,” Andrea sat back so suddenly it startled Athena. “Then it’s really a disability issue, isn’t it? She’s visibly afflicted, and the rest of us *are* privileged because we can pass for normal empowerment. I have to go with Gaia. We need to make our superpowers as visible as hers.”

“But having superpowers is not an affliction! It’s a *gift* and we can’t be as effective if we’re public!” Crone was annoyed to hear the issue reframed in terms of political correctness.

Suddenly the door banged open. Medusa was back, snakes in full array. “I decided I don’t want to work with you anyway, so you don’t have to argue about it anymore. I’m better off on my own. I always am.”

“But we’re not.” Andrea wheeled her chair to face her. “We need you.” Athena struggled to her feet.

Medusa was caught off-guard. “You’re just saying that.”

“No.” Andrea turned to face the others. “This is a diversity issue. If we think that there is anything more important than standing with you, then we

don’t understand power at all, and all the superpowers in the world aren’t going to make up for that ignorance.” She paused to catch her breath. “And if we save a world, it won’t be the one I care about.”

“That’s right.” Gaia had joined Andrea, but they all knew that Crone—or, rather, her superpower, would have the last word, because reality, simply by virtue of the fact it is real, always wins.

Crone understood the responsibility vested in her superpower, and she was excruciatingly conscientious in applying it. After a moment of tense silence, she spoke: “My superpower tells me that this is not the best way to use our powers… and I believe in my power… ” Medusa started to interrupt, but Gaia put a gentle, but firm hand on the girl’s arm. Medusa surprised herself by allowing it to rest there.

Crone continued, “*And*, at the same time, I think that my superpower works like a computer, within the parameters it’s been given.” She paused. “I may not be entirely conscious of what those parameters are. In fact, I may not be in the best position to critique my own programming. I believe that Andrea has said something very wise here, and I think that, if the Furies do go public, this will require a radical reconfiguration for all of us, which may well result in a different formula—one that could mean an enhancement of our powers beyond what we currently envision.”

“So you’re saying you want to go public?” Medusa was confused by Crone’s turnaround. In her world, adversaries never changed their minds, never reversed positions—or, at least, never admitted it.

“Yes.” Crone rose. “I’m saying ‘Four Musketeers.’”

“And what if I say I don’t want to?”

Andrea turned to Medusa. “I would ask you to reconsider.” She was being sincere, and Medusa knew it. It was going to take a superpower that had nothing to do with snakes and sand for her to ride out an alliance with a woman whose opinion meant so much to her. But, she thought, if *they* could come out of hiding, so could she. The Furies would blunder around

together. They would make mistakes, glorious mistakes like Andrea's. And they would forgive, and be human, and maybe this would be what family should have been all along.

Looking around the kitchen, it occurred to Medusa that there might be all kinds of superpowers lying around, just waiting for women who had the courage to pick them up.

Andrea and Medusa Get Intimate

Andrea lay in bed, her heart pounding with emotions. The sight of the figure standing before her, naked, in the dark motel room flooded her with primal feelings of shock, rage, helplessness, and shame. But even as her body responded to the perceived crisis, the therapist part of her brain began to engage. New feelings began to infiltrate, and these were as conflicting as the old: compassion, even pity, horror, and a sadness that went right to the bottom of everything, like a stone dropped into a well.

While her body continued its escalation to full fight-flight mode, Andrea's brain began to understand that this was not about her. She was not the one in danger. In fact, it was she who held the power in this situation—the power to violate and retraumatize, or the power to teach and heal. But she would need to be careful—very careful, which was going to be a challenge with her runaway physiological responses.

Meanwhile, Medusa continued to stand like a statue in front of Andrea's bed. She was offering herself to her beloved mentor. Fourteen years old and going on fifty, she knew all about adult lust. She knew what it could do *to* people and she knew what it could do *for* people. She had been thinking about this ever since the Furies decided she could go with Andrea on the stake-out. She had been planning it all day, waiting for the right time. And now, Andrea was lying in bed, and she, Medusa, had just gotten out of the shower. It was perfect. It was natural. For the first time in her life, she, Medusa was in charge. Tonight, for the first time in her life, Medusa was initiating; Medusa was doing the choosing.

Tonight it would not be some strange man, someone to whom her father owed a favor. It would not be some neighborhood bully who had outrun her on the way home from the convenience store. And, finally, it would not be her brother. Medusa had left those nightmare experiences behind forever on the day when she had come into her superpowers. She believed no one would ever victimize her again. She believed she was taking back her body, taking back her sexuality. She did not understand that she was setting

herself up for a betrayal and victimization that could cause more permanent scars than her experiences with perpetrators.

Back at the Furies' headquarters, Gaia had decided it was time to give the inside of all the cabinets a thorough cleaning. This would entail removing all of the dishes and canned goods, washing down the cabinets, replacing the shelf paper, and then putting everything back. Gaia was looking forward to it: It was a simple job, with orderly steps and guaranteed results. It was ten o'clock at night, and she had just begun to stack the plates on the counter top when Crone wandered in for a cup of chamomile tea.

"What are you doing?"

Gaia knew Crone well enough to know that she wasn't really asking what she was doing. She was really asking her what she was anxious about. All of the Furies knew that Gaia was a compulsive housecleaner, and much as they enjoyed the benefits of her obsession, they loved her too much to enable it.

"I thought I would just wipe down the cabinets… "

Crone turned on the stove burner with the kettle on it. "I see."

Gaia was just beginning the orderly transfer of the saucers to the countertop, but she found, with Crone watching, it was difficult to achieve the same sense of purpose and satisfaction. She became aware of the lateness of the hour and the absurdity of her mission. With a sigh, she returned the saucers to the cupboard, and then began to move the plates back to the dusty ring of old shelf paper—the shelf paper that would not be replaced after all—at least, not tonight. Tactfully, Crone pretended not to notice.

"Would you like a cup of chamomile tea? It might help you sleep…"

Gaia sat down with grim resignation. Crone set out a cup, pretending to be conversational: “Andrea and Medusa are probably asleep by now. They would have gotten to the motel by six, too late to do any surveillance. I imagine they got something to eat and just went to bed.”
“I know. I know.” Gaia sighed. “It’s just… Medusa is so young, and Andrea… ” She let the word hang there.

Andrea was too nice, was what she wanted to say. Gaia’s experiences running a battered women’s shelter had put rough edges on her soft heart, the kind of rough edges that she felt Andrea needed to have in dealing with the newest member of the Furies. Andrea was a gifted therapist, but in real life, it took more than making referrals to handle difficult people.

Andrea and Medusa had volunteered themselves for a fact-finding mission. The Furies had received somewhat sketchy information about a potential perpetrator who worked at a day care center, and Andrea was going to investigate. There was nothing unusual in that. As a Fury, Andrea frequently went on missions like this. What was different was that Medusa, their newest member, had gone with her.

“Medusa.” Crone said the name as if it was a complete sentence. The tea water began to boil. “Well, speaking of hot water.” She opened the cabinet where the tea was kept, looking for the chamomile.

“It’s behind the peppermint.” Gaia was thinking. “We could call her, you know… just checking in.”

“We could.” Crone dropped the teabag into the pot and began to pour the water over it. “And wake them up.”
“Why didn’t we ask Andrea to call us when they got there?”

“I don’t think our worrying is going to help them, and I don’t think it’s going to do us much good either… except, of course, the cabinets.”

Gaia smiled. Crone’s superpower, the ability to determine the best allocation of resources at any given moment, was in evidence. “I just wish that one of us had gone along, to give Andrea support.”

Crone poured tea into Gaia's cup. "Medusa was supposed to be her support, if I'm remembering the plan correctly."

"You know what I mean."

Crone smiled. "If Andrea was here, she would be asking us if our concerns might not reflect some adultism on our part, tinged with the inevitable racism and classism of assumptions about a troubled girl with a ghetto background."

"Don't forget the 'butch phobia.'"

Crone smiled. Sometimes Gaia went overboard with the name-the-oppression game. "As far as I can tell, it's butch privilege, not butch phobia that's in action here. Seems Andrea and Medusa put together the plan before either one of us had anything to say about it."

"What do you mean?"

Faces of former women's studies students rose to memory, as Crone considered the most effective response to the question. "The assertiveness of so-called 'masculine women' tends to elicit deferential behaviors on the part of fem women—"

"Now, wait a minute! What I think you're talking about is an instinctual desire to shield the butch from the oppression she gets for being so visibly deviant." Gaia had her back up. Crone had apparently touched on a sore subject for her. "Just because I'm *considerate and aware* doesn't mean I'm playing into patriarchal gender roles."

"I'm not saying anything about you. I'm simply remarking on my observations of forty years in a women's studies department. Butch women were allowed to get away with a lot of the same crap that male students were… "

“But only by other lesbians! Lesbians who might have been compensating for all the other bullshit the butches have to face!”

“That was not my experience.” Crone indulged in a little diversionary housecleaning of her own, reclosing the box of tea and replacing it behind the peppermint.

Gaia was not diverted. “Just because your generation didn’t acknowledge the validity of the lesbian genders, because they confused them with the oppressive gender roles of heteropatriarchy, you think you can attribute privilege to the lesbians who are the most despised, the most assaulted—”

Ignoring a certain tingling near the temporal lobes that warned her this was not her best use of resources, Crone turned with irritation to confront the younger woman. “What are these mystical ‘lesbian genders?’ Perhaps you can enlighten me, because when I see a woman who smears chemical pigment on her face, who deforms her posture with contraptions on her feet that *hamper* mobility instead of facilitating it, who wears clothing that is designed to show skin—”

“No! *Culture*! This is my *culture*!” Gaia slammed the cup of chamomile down, spilling the tea on the wooden table. “And, yes, some of it is Latina. And some of it is lesbian. And some of it is *me*. And I am not trying to look like a het woman, if that is what you are trying to say. And, no, I am not trying to pass. And you wear the clothing of your culture. It’s androgynous, because that was the *culture* you grew up in.”

“Oh, no… ” Crone was getting angry now. “The culture I grew up in *was* the makeup, and the high heels, and the skirts—and, believe me, it was *not* optional!”

“Okay! Okay! The culture you *came of age* in. The culture you came out in.” Gaia was wiping up the tea with the corner of the placemat. “But you did not invent yourself. You wore what the lesbians around you were wearing. And your culture, your generation, was terrible to the butches!”

“No—”

“Si! Si! I know!” Incensed, Gaia was waving a finger at Crone. “You said they were trying to be like the men. You told them they were wrong if they wanted to use dildoes!”

Crone attempted to de-escalate the confrontation, moving it away from the apparent hot-buttons of sex and gender into the more neutral territory of Marxist feminism. “We *critiqued* what we were doing. We didn’t accept anything and everything just because it was what was around us. We asked ourselves ‘Who benefits from this?’”

Gaia was beyond the calming influence of Marx. “Who benefits from the dildo? I will tell you, Crone—I do! I like it! There! Like I like my makeup, because it makes me look pretty. I like to look pretty. And I like the high heels. I feel *powerful* when I wear them. And I like my skirts. And I am not a bimbo or a fembot. I make my own choices, and I tell men—sometimes violent men—to go to hell every week of my life. So tell me about my deferential behavior!”

Crone nodded to herself, looking into her cup. The conversation had been, she knew, a mistake.

Gaia was wringing her teabag with a vengeance. “See, this judgmentalism… This is why the young dykes aren’t feminists. Or don’t want to call themselves feminists. All this judgmentalism, all this holier-than-thou… ”

Crone was feeling annoyed. She was violating her own superpower by indulging in a pointless argument on a subject that was guaranteed to arouse passions—and it was late at night, when even productive arguments can’t be pursued efficiently. She rose from her seat. Gaia, wary, watched her.

The older woman crossed slowly to the cabinet, opened it, and began to move the plates to the counter. Gaia said nothing. Crone moved one plate, and then another. The stack of plates on the counter began to grow. As Crone reached for the saucers, Gaia began to laugh. Crone ignored her, continuing to stack the saucers. Gaia knew that, unless she intercepted her,

Crone would continue until all the dishes were on the counter, and then she would begin cleaning the cabinets. It was Crone's way of apologizing.

Gaia let her get as far as the cups before she rose and wrapped her arms around the old woman. Truce.

"Medusa… " Andrea broke the silence in the motel room. The figure by the bed took a step towards her, mistaking Andrea's action for a summons. Andrea realized her mistake: "Wait." The figure stopped, uncertain. Andrea had no idea what to do. She knew that Medusa had a crush on her, the kind that many of her patients developed. "Transference" was the old-school word for it, but Andrea didn't like the sound of that. Transferring what? Feelings that belonged somewhere else? The case could be made that all romantic love is transference, some infantile, endorphin-induced attempt to recreate the paradise-lost of that early, vital mother-love.

Andrea took her patients' crushes seriously. She took herself seriously. She respected her patients. She reflected them back to themselves as accurately as she could, correcting the distortions caused by low self-esteem. Why wouldn't they love her, adore her, even? She was trying to give them back themselves. She represented, for many, the healthiest relationship they had ever had.

Medusa adored her. Of course she did. And here she was offering the only part of herself she felt had any value to anybody: her body. Of course she was. It was a gift, and the only one Medusa knew how to give. How to turn it down without devastating the girl…?

Ah, the pick-up sticks of the fragmented personality! How to extract the inappropriate physical gesture without disturbing the fragile matrix of an emergent, healthy desire for mutuality…? Andrea would have to figure it out, because a young woman's psyche depended on it.

Andrea remembered her own first sexual encounter. It had also been a silent presentation, not naked—at least physically—but stripped to the bone

emotionally. She remembered her humiliation, her retreat into shame, when the object of her desire had responded to her inept, adolescent overture with a rejection that had been equally adolescent and socially inept. Andrea had been crushed, and it was years before she had gotten up her nerve to approach another woman.

Even though it was too dark to see, Andrea knew that Medusa's eyes were boring into her. The same eyes that could turn perpetrators to stone… Those eyes watching for the slightest signal to indicate acceptance or rejection. Acceptance would trigger an aggressive sexuality modeled by her perpetrators, and rejection… well, it could trigger anything: violence, flight, self-harm. There was one thing of which Andrea was sure—this girl did not need another rejection.

"Medusa, I would like to talk to you."

Medusa heard the words like a slap in the face. Andrea was talking to her like a child, like a patient. She had heard that tone of voice before, and always by people who were talking to themselves, talking to the fictional girl they needed to believe she was, people who were using her to make themselves look good at her expense—as if she had any expense to spare. Yeah: *"Medusa, we need to talk."* At least, Andrea had not used the plural pronoun. "We" was the real bomb-detonator. When had there *ever* been a "we," and especially between herself and an adult, or herself and a white person, or herself and a straight woman, or herself and anyone on the whole freakin' planet?

Medusa turned and walked back into the bathroom, slamming the door. Andrea had no idea what to do. Was Medusa going to cut herself? Had she brought along any drugs? Bathrooms could be scary places in a therapist's world of public institutions. They were frequently places of last resort for people whose rights and whose privacy had been chronically, institutionally violated. The bathrooms of desperate people sheltered—and fostered—many secrets.

Silently, Andrea offered up the therapist's prayer: "What do I do now?"

Her goddess apparently had a sense of humor, because just then Medusa shouted, “You’re not my fuckin’ therapist!” These words were followed by the slamming open of the bathroom door. Medusa, snakes in full activation, was completely clothed. Andrea realized the girl probably didn’t own a pair of pajamas, and wouldn’t wear one if she did. Naked or fully-clothed: Those were often a survivor’s two modes. Utterly vulnerable or shields-up. All-or-nothing. Black-or-white. And Andrea was white.

Medusa got into her bed, turning her back toward Andrea. This was hopeful. She hadn’t left, and she could have. In fact, she could have taken the keys and the van, along with Andrea’s wallet and ID. There would have been no way Andrea could have chased her. And, even as she thought that, she realized that was why. Medusa, little butch warrior that she was, would never have taken advantage of her own temporary able-bodiedness in order to punish Andrea—no matter how much she hated her. And Andrea was pretty sure she was hating her now.

In fact, Medusa’s rage had been sidetracked by the more practical problem of laying a head full of snakes on a pillow. She realized that she had never tried to go to bed in a state of rage before—at least, not since she had become “Medusa,” the girl whose dreads could turn into snakes. The already aroused serpents were even more cantankerous about being squashed. Medusa didn’t want to lose face a second time, so she was attempting to hold her head a few inches off the pillow, while still feigning sleep.

Meanwhile, Andrea kept formulating sentences to break the silence, but everything she said made her sound like a therapist. But, wait a minute… That was it! What a simple solution: “Medusa, I want to talk to you, but everything I can think of to say makes me sound like a therapist.”

“That’s your problem.” Medusa pulled the covers over her head. This was apparently a mistake. “Ouch! Shit! Mutha-fuckas bit me!”

What a relief, thought Andrea. A simple problem like hair that has turned into snakes! Something, anything rather than sex… “What can I do to help?”

“You can stop talking like a fuckin’ therapist, because you keep doin’ that, I’m never goin’ to stop being pissed.”

Athena had been roused by Medusa’s cry of pain, and now the hissing of the snakes was causing the fur on her back to rise. Andrea put out a hand.

“Athena, it’s okay… It’s okay, girl. Lie down… Lie down… good girl.”

Athena groaned and dumped herself back on the rug. Medusa was watching. She, too, had the authority to address her menagerie. “Okay, snakes… Okay… I hear you. Now, it’s okay… Y’all just lay yourselves back down, now. Good girls… .Just lay down… Go on… Just lay back down, now… ”

In the dark, Andrea smiled. “Is it working?”

“Yeah… I think it is.”

“Maybe you could sing them something… like a lullabye?”

“Shit, I don’t know no lullabies. Some hip-hop be more like it.”
“You could try it.”

“Girl, you got snakes *in* your head… I can’t sing!”

Andrea laughed. In the dark, Medusa smiled. And there was a sudden stillness across her scalp. Reaching up a tentative hand, she felt the familiar texture of her short dreads. No snakes. “They gone.”

Andrea waited. There was still a conversation to be had, but at least some of the tension had dissipated. “What do we have left to eat?”

Medusa got out of bed and crossed over to the cooler. “Some yogurt, and a half a bag of popcorn, and some of that birdseed you like to eat.”

“Can you hand me the birdseed?”

“You want a soda?”

“No… Just the sunflower seeds.”

Medusa handed her the bag. “Don’t see how you can eat those things.”
“I put them in my mouth, and then I chew them—”

“Oh, shit.” Medusa was laughing. “I’m glad, because this means I get the rest of the popcorn.”

“Okay, but you gotta listen to my story.”

“No therapy shit.”

“No therapy shit.” Medusa opened a can of ginger ale.

“Okay,” Andrea began. “You just scared the shit out of me.”

Medusa was uncomfortable. “This don’t sound like no story to me.”

“Well, it is, and it’s mine, not yours.” Medusa stuffed a handful of popcorn into her mouth. “Now, if you don’t want me to talk to you like a therapist, then you’ve got to stop listening to me like a client. Because friends don’t always like what they hear, but it’s not about them. You can’t have it both ways. If it’s all about you, then anything I say is going to sound like therapy. But if you want me to talk to you like a friend, then you have to listen like a friend. A grown-up friend.”

That stung, but Andrea was making sense, and Medusa knew it. She didn’t say anything.

“You scared the shit out of me, because it’s scary to be in bed and see somebody coming toward you with no clothes on. It took me a minute to figure out what was really going on. Part of my brain was referencing dangerous situations from the past.”

“Don’t need to tell me about that.” As soon as Medusa said it, she was sorry. It’s what she would say to a therapist. “Go on. I’m listenin.’”

“And then I was scared, because I didn’t know how you would react when I said ‘no.’”

Medusa drank the ginger ale, washing down the words, swallowing them with her pride. Like a grownup, she hoped.

“So, then I was feeling angry that I was worried about taking care of your feelings, when here I am in bed, confronted with this scary-looking situation… *and* the fact that I could go to prison if I did what you were wanting me to do—but I can’t be angry, because you’re young and you’re still post-traumatic and I’m a therapist and I’m supposed to be compassionate. And then I’m all confused, because you *are* young and you *are* post-traumatic, and here we’ve gone and accepted you into the Furies, when the rest of us are adults and none of us have any superpowers that are as visible or violent as yours.”

“They’re not violent!”

“Killing perpetrators?”

“Not violent.” Medusa’s words were muffled by a mouthful of popcorn. “They deserve it or they wouldn’t turn to stone!”

“They may deserve it, but it’s still violent. But I’m telling my story.” Medusa mumbled something. “So I am scared and angry and, at the same time, feeling all the sadness and frustration from caring about someone who had so many terrible things done to them—”

“Nobody asked you to.” There was a long silence. “Yeah, okay. I’m listenin.’”

Andrea resumed. “And then I want to talk about the disability piece, because that’s something you don’t know about.” And here it was Andrea who stopped. She knew she wasn’t the therapist anymore, but was she

expecting Medusa to become one? She was going to explain something about her reality as a woman with cerebral palsy. Was Medusa going to read this as vulnerability? What was Andrea so afraid of?

What, indeed? Everything. It didn't matter how independent she was, how many degrees she had earned, how many hours she worked, how much money she made, because, in the eyes of the state, her family, and the world she would always, always, always be seen as someone who could not take care of herself, someone in perpetual need of institutionalizing. Andrea closed her eyes, as the memories began to flood. She had learned that it was easiest to just let them come, to breath in, make room for them, and then move on.

So what *was* she afraid of? In the darkness, she smiled at the privilege behind the voice that could even ask that question. The answer would be, "Everything, everyone, all the time." Being a superhero was nothing. Really.

The long silence had gotten Medusa's attention. Andrea was getting ready to say something personal, and she, Medusa, the one who had been wanting so desperately to be naked with this woman, was suddenly very aware that she was terrified of Andrea revealing herself. This was scary. Way scarier than sex. She set the popcorn down.

Andrea took a breath. "Sometimes people are attracted to people with disability, because they want to rescue or fix—"

"No way, man—"

"Let me finish." How was she going to put this without hurting Medusa? Because, of course, that desire to rescue another adult was usually rooted in low self-esteem… Andrea took a breath. "These feelings can be very strong, so it's easy to confuse them with love." Medusa was starting to interrupt, but Andrea pressed on. "And maybe it *is* love… just not the healthy, partnering kind. It's more the like the feelings an adult might have toward a child—"

“Yeah, yeah.” Medusa knew all about it. Generally the therapists who had taken an interest in her had been like that… maternal, and getting off on it at the same time. And then, when the fantasy went sour, they became dangerous women. Really dangerous. How could Andrea be confusing her with one of *them*?

She wasn’t: “I know that’s not where you are coming from. I know. I always know. But that’s not the point. Look, it’s like with Athena… ”

Athena’s ears pricked up, and automatically Andrea put a gentle hand on her head.

“She’s a service dog. There’s a time and a place when she gets to be a regular dog, but not when she’s working. People don’t think about that. They aren’t considering her situation. They aren’t taking time to check out her reality. They just reach out to make a connection with her, because that’s what they feel like, because that’s what *they* need—”.

Medusa was feeling shame, and that was really uncomfortable. Usually she could head off a shame attack with counter-aggression, but Andrea had her in a tight corner with all this “adult listening” business. It occurred to her that it might be a set-up. She shifted her position warily.

Andrea realized that what she was trying to do was impossible. How could she *not* talk like a therapist? That’s what she was. How could she *not* hurt this girl? This girl was hurting all over. Hell, just to *look* at her would hurt. And what the hell was she doing comparing herself with Athena? What the hell was that about? And suddenly, Andrea just let it go. She let it all go. What the hell.

“Yeah, so when you approach someone sexually, you might just want to consider *their* reality.” Medusa felt a snake uncoil.

Andrea was angry now. “Because everybody has a history, and, if you want them to trust you—and that’s what we’re really talking about here, because intimacy is all about trust—then you need to take the time to learn what that history is and to understand the language of their symbols and show some

respect and some *sensitivity* for how other people might interpret your gestures based on *their* histories instead of *your* intentions, which they have no way of knowing… *And* then there's the piece were I could go to prison —"

"I wasn't going to tell!"

But Andrea wouldn't stop. "That's not the point. It's a crime, because it's wrong. I counsel women all day long who were violated as children—

"Yeah, and I'm one of them! And I ain't no perp. If I was I'd turn *myself* to stone."

"Yeah, well, you turn yourself to stone plenty."

Suddenly, Medusa began to cry. She had no idea why. Maybe it had to do with the listening. Maybe it *was* too much. Maybe things *did* need to be all about her all the time, at least for a while. Maybe she was really, truly, just a fourteen-year-old. Maybe she needed all the love, all the attention. And maybe she had just done something really, really hurtful to the one person she would take a bullet for.

And maybe she didn't have any of the skills to figure any of this out—how to live in this snaky body, how to go to sleep with a head full of rage, how to live and work with someone she ached all over to touch—no, to be touched by—and it was all just too, too much, and it had been for so long, she couldn't even think about it, but here it was coming up out of her anyway in great spasms of sobbing.

She heard Andrea getting out of bed. She couldn't even think about it. She hoped she wasn't going to touch her. Ever. Feelings were swirling around her brain like a tornado. With relief, and, at the same time, disappointment, she heard Andrea opening the cooler, heard her open a soda. Andrea was definitely not being a therapist. That was good… yeah, that was *way* good.

"And then there's the butch thing… " Andrea was determined to push through. "People think that a butch is like a man, and that you can't insult a

butch by offering us sex, because we're supposed to want it all the time. Lesbians will sexually ambush butches in ways that they would never dream of doing to a fem. That really pisses me off. I mean, it *really* pisses me off… "

Yeah, Medusa thought. Yeah. She took a deep breath. Yeah.

"So all those things were going on in my head, when you were standing there. Talk about snakes… My brain was swarming."

"I'm sorry." There was a complete silence in the room that seemed to last forever.

"Thank you." There was another long silence. And then Andrea did something that would have been unthinkable just fifteen minutes before. She did something she had never done with any of the other Furies. She took a deep breath, and she asked for help.

"Would you mind getting some more water for Athena? I knocked over her bowl."

"No problem." Medusa picked up the dog's water bowl and crossed into the bathroom, which was just a plain bathroom again, not a super-charged staging area. She wanted to fill the bowl, fill a billion bowls, and then stand guard all night, watching to make sure that Athena had enough water. Maybe every night for the rest of her life.

In the darkness, they both listened to the gentle sound of Athena lapping water. It was awkward, this telling the truth, and it was painful, this admitting faults and failures. But, for all the awkwardness and all the pain, there was one thing that could definitely be said for it: It was real.

Becca and the Woman Prince

This story is dedicated to the memory of
Fannyann Eddy.

Once upon a time, there was a princess named Becca who lived in a kingdom with her father and mother and a great number of subjects, which is why Becca grew up as an object.

Becca was a curious, white girl, and she noticed everything around her. She noticed that the castle floors were always shiny on Tuesday and dull on Monday. She noticed that the great cats who roamed the palace halls never came when they were called, which is why no one ever called them. And she noticed that when she played with her marbles, people always told her to do it somewhere else.

Becca asked a lot of questions, but, even more than that, she made observations. At dinner, she would want to talk about the green beans, and whether or not the way you slice them affects the way they taste. At breakfast, she would want to talk about the ponies in the meadow, and how they toss their heads, and why. And at the noon hour, she was likely to talk about the dam she built in the creek, or the insect larva she had found, or the great owl in the oak tree.

But no one ever listened to Becca. Around the palace she was known as Becca the Bore, or Becca the Boring, or the Princess Who Bores Everyone. And the more people cut her off, or got up and left in the middle of a conversation, or changed the subject, the more Becca would talk to herself.

Finally, the king, in exasperation, decided that the best thing to do would be to marry her off to a prince who lived in another kingdom. He sent out announcements that Princess Becca was accepting suitors. And, of course, he sent out miniature paintings of the princess with these announcements. These bore little resemblance to Becca, but that was generally the way with

these sorts of portraits, and the princes who would respond probably knew that anyway.

And so the first batch of suitors arrived. They were cordial, correct, and uncomfortable. In fact, the best part of their visit was the soccer match they arranged on Saturdays among themselves. Becca came down the second Saturday to play with them, she being very skilled with her feet, but the princes all got uncomfortable again, and pretty soon Becca found herself on an empty field, kicking the ball around.

The courtship was very structured, and for an hour in the morning and then an hour in the evening, one or another of them would come and talk with Becca in her bower –properly chaperoned, of course.

Becca was charmed to have company that would pay attention to her and not leave for an hour, and she talked almost incessantly. She would occasionally pause for her companion to jump in, but princes are a dull lot, and they couldn't see any point in saying anything, since the courtship of a princess has very little to do with whether or not you actually like her.

Pretty soon it was coming to the informal end of the first round of formal suitors. The king waited daily for the request for an audience with him that would indicate that one of them was going to ask for her hand. But the king waited in vain.

The princes had decided among themselves that there was something definitely wrong with Becca. Apparently, she did not understand her role at all, which at this stage of the game—even before the wedding vows!—was pretty disconcerting. They tried to imagine what it would be like to ride back to their kingdoms with Becca talking the whole time, or what they would do if she started insisting on joining them in the hunt or for tournaments. Really, she seemed capable of anything! And it was difficult for any of them to feel the sort of manly throb that portends a happy marriage, when the intended object of their desire showed not one shred of passivity, helplessness, or submissive behavior.

And so the princes took their leave, each one called suddenly home by some unspecified crisis in the family. Becca dutifully stood on the battlements and waved them off. She was not aware that she had been rejected, because she had never seen herself as up for sale in the first place. The whole thing had been an interesting diversion.

The king sent out a second round of announcements, this time to kingdoms far across the sea, to strange lands where foreign languages were spoken and where the customs and the people were very different from his own. Because of the unfortunate reports that would inevitably circulate from the first round of suitors, the lack of a common language could prove to be an advantage.

These suitors came also, but it seems that Becca's behaviors transgressed all cultural borders. The second round of suitors left much as had the first.

At this point, the queen stepped in. She hired "tutors" for Becca. She recruited the most fashionable women at court to instruct her daughter in the art of dressing like a princess. Becca was fascinated, and she asked so many questions about the point of ribbons and lacings and frills, and so many questions about why some women wore fancy clothes and why others wore homespun, and she made so many comments on the effect of fashion on the physiology of the body that the ladies became self-conscious and, finally, exasperated. They reported to the queen that Becca was making fun of them. Becca, as usual, was oblivious to the effect she had on those around her.

The queen hired women skilled in the art of talking to men, which, more accurately put, is the art of listening to men. Becca found the stratagems fascinating, and she enjoyed role-playing the part of the men during the teaching sessions, but when confronted with the real thing, she could never restrain herself from jumping in with corrections or questions about whatever the man had said.

Finally, both the king and queen gave up, and Becca was left to her long walks, to her books, paintings, building projects, scientific experiments, and music. And so things went on for a few more years.

And then one day a stranger strode up to the gates of the castle and announced her intention to woo the Princess Becca. This warrior from another culture wore a loose-fitting smock over tight trousers, with a bow slung across her back. Around her neck, on a string of bright beads, was one of the battered miniatures sent out by Becca's father. She came bearing a sack of kola nuts to offer to Becca. Her skin was as dark as Becca's was light, and her short hair grew in tight coils close to her scalp.

The king and queen were flustered. It never occurred to them that a woman would court their daughter. Such a thing had never been done before. Or, perhaps, the queen had a sister somewhere who never married and lived with another spinster, and maybe the king could remember a distant cousin who had a similar arrangement. But surely these were women who couldn't get a husband. Surely they had not *chosen* such a life!

The royal pair called in their advisors. The advisors advised them to determine the status of the visitor before they did anything to offend her. Perhaps female marriages were customary in her kingdom… or queendom… ?

And so they called in the Woman Prince, for such, indeed, she was. When it was suggested by the chancellor that "Woman Prince" was synonymous with "Princess," the visitor fixed a steely eye on the unfortunate man until his arguments crumbled right out of his mouth. And so the Woman Prince, whose name was Ymoja, was accepted as a prince, and it was determined that, as a prince, she had a right to court the Princess Becca.

Becca, as was usually the case with things regarding her welfare, was told nothing—only to expect a prince for lunch. Becca was seated in her bower, kicking her soccer ball around under her long skirt and nibbling the corners off the watercress sandwiches, while she waited for her new visitor. She had been experimenting with plant decoctions all morning, trying to extract the scent from roses, and her hands were stained yellow.

The Woman Prince was escorted into the bower by Becca's former governess, who was the chaperon for these occasions. Ymoja froze when she caught sight of the Princess, who was at that very moment executing a

kick that sent the tea table and the sandwiches flying. The governess began to scold her for being so careless, but the Woman Prince trapped the ball between her strong ankles and then gave it a sharp kick which sent it sailing over Becca's head and through the open window behind her. Becca scrambled over the back of the bench to see where it landed. The leather ball had just cleared the moat, landing in a pile of rushes on the far side, where it flushed out a pair of disgruntled ducks.

Disguising her admiration, Becca turned to the Woman Prince: "I hope you know you're going to have to go and get it." The Woman Prince turned to the chaperon. The chaperon, at a loss to interpret for the Woman Prince, turned to Becca. Becca, never at a loss, used her hands to explain how the Woman Prince would need to leave the chamber, go all the way back down the great staircase, cross over the lowered drawbridge, climb into the mud, retrieve the ball from the duck nest, and bring it back to her. The Woman Prince stood shaking her head from side to side, until, finally, Becca, completely exasperated, took her by the arm and pulled her toward the door herself, and all the way down the great staircase, and out across the castle drawbridge. The chaperon, who had not had her lunch, stayed behind and finished Becca's sandwiches.

Becca continued to talk the whole way down to the moat—which was not unusual, although she did incorporate more gestures into her speech than was her custom. When the two girls reached the far bank of the moat, where the soccer ball lay in the mud, Becca pointed to the mud and then to the Woman Prince. The Woman Prince nodded gravely, as if she understood, pointing to the mud and then back to the Princess. This went on for a few minutes, each taking turns pointing and nodding, until finally the Princess realized that the Woman Prince was mocking her. Becca had been making a fool of herself by treating the Woman Prince like an idiot, just because she didn't speak Becca's language.

Becca smiled at her own stupidity, retrieved the ball, and began to head back to the palace. The Woman Prince reached out her hand and stopped her. Ymoja took the ball from Becca's hand and set it on a level patch of ground. Then, lifting up her foot slowly and placing it very gently on top of the ball, she turned her head and looked solemnly at the Princess. Becca

solemnly reached down and pulled the back hem of her skirt up, between her legs, and tucked it into the front of her waistband. She gave the ball a solid boot, and the two women took off. They ran and kicked and rolled until they were both covered with dust and sweat and were feeling very good about themselves. Becca smiled at her new friend and said, “I want to learn your language. Teach me.”

The Woman Prince understood exactly what Becca was asking, and she answered, in her own language, “I will.”

And so every day and all day, the Woman Prince and Becca would get together and teach each other their languages. Very soon, they could communicate well enough to disagree, and this was a great thing for Becca, because no one had ever taken her seriously enough to argue. Their voices would ring out loudly all over the palace, as they ran up the stairs and down the garden paths, talking, shouting, laughing… talking, talking, talking.

The Woman Prince taught Becca about her home in West Africa, Mali, which she called “the Bright Country.” She showed Becca her “sassa,” a goatskin pouch with magic charms which she carried with her at all times, explaining how the “jinn,” or spirits, caused trouble for anyone caught without their “sassa.” And the Woman Prince talked about the “simbon,” or hunters in her country, and how they were protected by two hunter gods, and how these two male gods would become very angry unless their names were always said together, because they were so deeply in love with each other.

The Woman Prince spoke of many things, but she never spoke of her family or of the women from her country.

The more Becca listened to the Woman Prince, the more she began to notice things—things she had always overlooked, even though they had been right in front of her for years. And one of the things she began to notice were boots, especially the boots the guardsmen wore when they were on duty at the palace.

One day, Becca asked one of the guardsmen where he got his boots. He told her they were issued by special order of the king. And so Becca went to her father. She wanted a pair of boots, she told him. They were better for riding, better for hiking, and a lot better for soccer. She explained about how her slippers kept coming off every time she got in a good kick, and how this prevented her from following through with a goal. The king sat and listened gravely, nodding his head as if he could sympathize. And so Becca drew out a pattern of her feet for him, gave him a pair of her most comfortable slippers, and handed him a rough sketch of the kind of lacings she had in mind for the boots.

The king sat for a long time looking at the drawing of the boots. He continued to look at the drawing long after Becca had left. He did not send for a shoemaker. He sent for his wife. And she looked at the drawing of the boots. And then she looked at the king.

They had been willing to allow the Woman Prince to court their daughter. They had even been willing to allow the Woman Prince to marry Becca and take her away to a foreign country. But they were not willing to allow her to turn their daughter into a prince. Two princes certainly couldn't marry, not even two women princes. And who would ever want their daughter after she had made herself into a prince? It was bad enough that she talked all the time.

The king and the queen realized that they needed to act quickly. Today it was the boots, tomorrow it might be trousers, and who knew after that? Would she want to inherit the kingdom, too? It was a bad business, this Woman Prince affair.

The next morning, the Woman Prince was summoned to the king's chamber. He had all of his chancellors lined up behind him. The Woman Prince was asked to sit, but she declined. The king, flustered, ordered the chair removed. And then he got down to his point: A mistake had been made. The Princess Becca had apparently been betrothed at birth to a prince from a neighboring kingdom, but because of some remodeling that had been going on in the document room at the time, the record of this arrangement had gotten mislaid, and it had only just recently come to light.

He, the king, was embarrassed to inform her of this, having granted the Woman Prince permission to court his daughter, and certainly no other prince had ever given his daughter so much pleasure, which only made this meeting twice as painful for him.

The Woman Prince had not moved a muscle since the removal of the chair. She did not look happy and she did not look sad. She stood like a statue. The king kept coming to the end of sentences, and looking expectantly at her. When she didn't move, he would ramble on with another stream of so-of-course-you-see's and believe-me-nothing-would-have-pleased-me-more's.

Eventually even the king ran out of stock phrases. Winding down like a toy drummer, he finally folded his hands and turned to his chancellors, who were making a point of staring straight ahead. The king gave up and looked at his lap. There was a long silence. Finally, the Woman Prince said something. Using the king's language, she asked, "Will that be all?"

The king nodded miserably, and the Woman Prince turned sharply and swept a contemptuous gaze across the faces of the chancellors, like a teacher wiping an insult off the chalkboard, and then she exited. The Woman Prince went directly to Becca.
Becca was astonished. She puzzled over who this prince could be, and how was it that no one had ever mentioned such a thing to her. The Woman Prince finally exploded, in her own language: "There is no prince."

Becca looked up, amazed. She spoke in *her* own language: "What do you mean?"

The Woman Prince for the first and only time in her life looked at Becca with contempt. Becca felt a pain unlike anything she had ever experienced. And in that instant, she knew that she would leave her castle, leave her people, leave her language, leave her innocence about the world—that she would leave everything she had ever known and learn another whole way of living in order that this woman whom she loved with all her heart and all her soul and all her body would never, never in her life, ever, have a reason

to look at her that way again. And she knew that the price could be nothing less.

Becca rose. “I understand,” she said in the language of the Woman Prince. “I will leave this place. I will leave tonight.”

The Woman Prince looked at her. Becca was standing, but she was not as tall as the Woman Prince, and she needed to tilt her head in order to look into her eyes. She repeated, “I will leave this place. Tonight.”

The Woman Prince, in a palace of lies, in a palace of liars, looked long and hard into Becca’s eyes. “I won’t take you,” she said.

Becca, stung for a second time by her lover—but this time by her words, answered her, “I didn’t ask you to. I am leaving because I don’t belong here.” She turned to leave, but something didn’t seem right. She turned back to the Woman Prince, and took off her ring. She held it out to her. “I want to give this to you, because I love you.”

The Woman Prince looked at the ring, an expensive ring, a white woman’s ring, the ring of a princess. And then she looked at Becca. Becca nodded, and put the ring back on her own finger. Great tears began to roll down her cheeks. The Woman Prince knew they were not for her. She knew they were the tears of a white girl who for once could not have what she wanted. And she turned and left before the tears rolled down her own cheeks, tears for an African Woman Prince who was so brave, so very alone in a palace of liars.

And that night, the queen drank more wine that she had in years—maybe as much wine as she had the night she and her girlfriend had gotten drunk and spent the night together almost forty years ago. The king took a potion, because he didn’t like the night.

Becca stuffed the cracks around the door and the windows of her bedroom, so that the light wouldn’t shine through, and she packed. She packed carefully, for the first time in her life having to worry about survival. In a way, her great heart-ache made the task easier. What could she fear when she had already lost the greatest thing in her life?

The Woman Prince paced the battlements, which were outside the large window of her chamber. She had come here—why? She had seen a picture of the white princess. Why had she come? Because in her kingdom they had no use for Woman Princes. Because her brothers were the ones who would inherit the kingdom. Because, where she came from, the women would be given in marriage to the men. Because this was a chance to go somewhere different, to start all over.

What had she been thinking? And if she *had* married Becca, where did she think she could take her? Back to her homeland, where Becca would see that Ymoja was only a princess in her own kingdom and not a Woman Prince at all? Wasn't this the ending she had known would have to happen all along? Stupid, stupid woman. Stupid. And part of her heart was hardened against the love of a soft, white girl who had been content to be a princess. And part of her heart cried out for that girl, because they had laughed and wrestled and argued and played soccer.

And the great and proud Woman Prince paced until the light of dawn began to appear in the sky. And then she heard the sound of the drawbridge being lowered, slowly—oh, so slowly. And with a shock, she saw Becca—Becca in boots!—leading her little, speckled pony across the drawbridge. And then, she saw her throw a bundle up on the saddle and swing herself onto the back of the pony. Becca, who didn't even know how to build a fire! Becca, who had no idea what the world was like! Becca, her lover, was riding out alone across the misty fields!

And in an instant, a blind and rushing instant, the Woman Prince tore back into her room, snatched up her bow and her sassa, and dashed down the great stairway, through the castle gate, and into the courtyard. She ran past the sleeping castle guards, past the dazed gatekeeper with his stocking feet and his shiny new gold piece. The drawbridge was still down and, racing over it, the Woman Prince could just see Becca on her pony in the distance. She lifted her voice and called out with her fiercest warrior cry, a cry that pierced the fog and rang across the damp fields as she broke into the long, even strides that had carried her so many miles from her African homeland —strides that now carried her toward the red glow of the newly-risen sun.

In the morning, the king and the queen were not surprised to hear that the Woman Prince was gone. That she had left all her belongings behind did seem odd, but no one really wanted to talk about the episode, and the queen ordered the things to be discretely packed into a chest and labeled and carried down to the cellar—in case the Woman Prince should send for them. After all, this was as much a question of diplomacy as hospitality.

There was a note on the princess' door that she did not want to see anybody or talk to anybody. And, frankly, nobody wanted to see her or talk to her—and so the note, the door, and the princess were left undisturbed.

It was not until the second day, when the servants began to whisper about whether or not the princess was eating, that the queen felt compelled to knock on her door. Too embarrassed to admit that her daughter would not speak to her, she reported that Becca had a sick headache and wished to be left alone.

As usual, it was the working women who figured out what was really going on: no food, no water, and especially no chamber pots to be emptied… ! Either the princess was killing herself or she was not there.

On the third day, one of the maids took it upon herself to climb out on the ledge of the castle wall and peer into the window of Becca's bedroom. The room looked as if a whirlwind had torn through it. Chests lay open with all their contents spilling out, clothing was strewn all over the bed, and the bed itself was torn apart—but no princess.

The queen became hysterical. The Woman Prince had kidnapped her daughter and was holding her for ransom! The king made unfortunate remarks about foreigners in general and women princes in particular. But, as always, it was the working women who figured out the truth. They noted that the mayhem in Becca's room was not indicative of a bloody struggle, but of a hasty flight. The ransacking, chaotic as it appeared, actually represented a thorough but hurried search for items whose existence, value, and whereabouts could have been known only to their owner. Besides, anyone who had ever seen the two women playing together would have

known how utterly unthinkable it was that either one of them should dominate the other for a minute longer than might be absolutely necessary to kick a field goal.

And so the queen, who had made a fool of herself by reporting the conversation with Becca, retreated to her bedchamber—and her wine—with her own sick headache. And the king, with some embarrassment, ordered destroyed the posters announcing a reward for the capture of the Woman Prince. A great silence descended on the castle. Becca's things were bundled together into several chests, labeled, and sent to the cellar, also. And the queen ordered that a lock be placed on the door to Becca's room.

The chancellors, the king, and the queen never made mention again of either Becca or the Woman Prince, and the servants learned to follow their example—at least when they were not among themselves.

As the years went by, rumors began to reach the palace of two girl knights—one black and one white—who were riding about the neighboring kingdoms punishing acts of violence against women and teaching girls to defend themselves. There were some who swore the whole thing was a myth, and there were others who believed in the knights, but who insisted they were two young men. And there were others—young girls of a marriageable age, mostly—who just disappeared one night and were never seen again by their families.

Years and years later, after wars and famines and plagues had ravaged the kingdom of Becca's childhood, a rumor reached the ears of the aging king. The queen, alas, had died many years earlier from an unfortunate fall from her bedchamber window.

The rumor was this: That at the very remotest corner at the far ends of the earth stood a small cottage, and a lovely garden with a creek running through it, and in this cottage lived two older women—one black and the other white—who had many visitors from near and far, but always women. And these visitors would come away struck by how much the two women loved their garden, and how much they loved their animals, and how much they loved their charming home… But the thing that would impress the

visitors the most was how much the two women loved—absolutely loved—talking to each other.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank Sudie Rakusin for her beautiful illustrations, and I want to thank AndreA Neumann-Mascis for her willingness to engage with me in painful and profound conversations about disability and sexuality. I am also grateful to GJ MacDonnell for her unflagging support, as well as her very helpful insights about the first draft of “The Furies.” The inspiration for Athena’s superpowers was from her. I want to thank all of the many women who have taught me so much about disability over the years, and of course, the woman who inspired the writing of “Princess of Pain.”

The Spindle owes its current incarnation to Deb Randall of Venus Theatre, who directed an inspired reading of it at the Kennedy Center, and to the wonderful women of Messenger Theatre in New York, who also held a reading of it. I want to thank the lesbian community in Sebastopol and Santa Rosa, who supported my work during my years there, and who were so generous with their feedback during the first reading of the play.

And a special thanks for Mary Trainor-Brigham for her proofreading and formatting suggestions.

Table of Contents

What Others Are Saying
Other Books by Carolyn Gage
Introduction
The Spindle
Cast of Characters
Scenes
Act I
Act II
The Princess of Pain
The Furies
Andrea and Medusa Get Intimate
Becca and the Woman Prince
Acknowledgements